



# ROYAL KASHO ON CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

**T**huchen Choeki Gyalpo Ngawang Namgyal laid the foundation of Bhutan's public service in Punakha Dzong nearly four centuries ago. Since then it has played a critical role in providing administration, dispensing justice, conducting foreign relations, and defending our sovereignty. It has provided continuity in governance and stability when our country faced severe challenges both externally and internally.

In the twentieth century, our country underwent profound changes in its socio-economic and political structure with the launch of modernisation programmes. In order to respond to the new challenges, His Majesty King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck initiated far-reaching reforms to streamline and modernise the public service, building upon the modest but important initiatives of our First and Second Kings. Thereafter, the structure, functions, and capacity of the public service had to be continually reformed and strengthened to make it more efficient in the delivery of goods and services and fulfil the aspirations of our people.

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck established the Department of Manpower in 1973 and transformed it into the Royal Civil Service Commission in 1981. In the subsequent four decades, the civil service grew in organisational sophistication, manpower, and outreach along with the expansion in the magnitude and scope of our national development plans and budget.

After the introduction of parliamentary democracy in 2008, it had to support the implementation of policies of consecutive governments. It also had to ensure continuity of governance during election cycles. This was especially important to sustain and strengthen the confidence of our people in the new democratic processes and institutions.

Supported by their numerical strength of over 31,000 people, repertoire of knowledge, skills, experience, and exposure, civil servants have served our country with loyalty and dedication in fostering balanced socio-economic development and the pursuit of our national vision of Gross National Happiness. They have contributed immensely to the success of our democracy and in nation-building, becoming an admired corp of well-educated, highly trained, and committed officials in the process.

Even as we celebrate their successes and achievements, we have to prepare for our future.

Our people are becoming more educated and skilled, more sophisticated in taste and talent, and indeed more aspirational for greater opportunities and life-chances.

Our future will become invariably intertwined with regional and global developments as well as the fusion of ideas, innovations, and technologies, which are taking place at a very fast pace. Both the site and space of the future is becoming globalised. Our people's sense of identity and belonging to national community will therefore, matter even more to enable them to navigate through the complexity and sophistication of the future.

As one of the most important institutions of our state, there is an urgent need for the civil service to re-examine itself so

that it is able to shoulder the responsibilities bestowed by the Constitution, live up to the trust and confidence reposed by the Throne, and meet the hopes and aspirations placed by our government and people. To promote good governance and social justice, civil servants must be professional, uphold the highest standards of ethics and integrity, and exhibit qualities of adroitness and compassion.

We need to acknowledge the genuine efforts made at reforms so far: Organisational Development, Leadership Development, Managing for Excellence, Civil Servants' Well-being, as well as periodic incentives and recognition have attempted to improve the competencies and performances of civil servants. Nevertheless, the core impediments against the development of a more professional and efficient bureaucracy remain entrenched in the system. So we must also have the audacity to equally acknowledge them in preparing for the future.

We are yet to leverage the large size of the civil service and translate it proportionally to performance and prevent it from becoming an impediment to our national development and progress. We have to take on board legitimate concerns over the sense of complacency and indifference generated by guarantee of job security. Protected employment has assumed that competencies and skills, job descriptions, and projects remain valid till superannuation. Seniority has been conflated with authority and competence. Institutions of check and balance have had the reverse effect of stifling initiative and courage in decision-making even as corruption is at risk of being institutionalised as a norm, and accountability has been minimal. Agencies pursue isolated sectoral objectives while administrative processes burden efficient service delivery. Communication and co-ordination has been further sidelined in the quest for autonomy by different agencies. Divisions and units proliferate to justify creation of more departments. Consequently, 35% of services are delivered by one government agency to another rather than to the people. Growth of institutions and increases in the number of civil servants tend to happen without coherence and direction.

As a result, we could not capitalise on the strength and opportunities provided by our small demographic and geographic sizes. In the process, we are losing valuable time and opportunity. This will prove costly for our small, land-locked country and aggravate our vulnerabilities to the daunting challenges of geographic and geo-strategic realities.

But we can still turn the tide around and achieve success beyond our dreams by taking advantage of the favourable circumstances arising from the uniqueness of our country's history, geography, culture, tradition, and indeed our people. We have the energy, wisdom, and blessing of our founders and guardian deities. Moreover, we are at the doorstep of two of the world's largest economies. We must take advantage of the opportunities they provide to build a strong, sustainable, equitable, and dynamic economy. The twenty-first century economy will be driven by artificial intelligence, robotics, automation, big data, and blockchain, while digital currency, digital wallet, digital

banking, and quantum computing will define the financial landscape. We must pre-empt these profound developments by restructuring the budget process, financial norms and procurement systems to fast-track our transition to a knowledge-based and tech-driven economy.

If we succeed in this, we will have built the unshakable foundations of a vibrant democracy, created the material conditions for realising GNH, and further strengthened our peace and security. If we are passive, slow, and daunted by the speed and complexity of innovation and change, we will not only fall behind others but our economy also risks being terminally dependent on foreign aid and loans. Instead, we must aspire to become self-reliant and a fully developed country within our lifetime. We must compete as equals with other nations and persevere to excel. For that we need highly capable and competent people, who are our most important assets.

So we must embark on a journey now in keeping with the tradition of timely reform, to fundamentally reorganise and restructure the civil service for the future, with a fearless resolve of the nature that Thuchen Choeki Gyampo Ngawang Namgyal demonstrated in building our nation.

He said, "My resolve is such that until the task is accomplished, I will persevere even if lightning should strike from above, the space in-between collapse, or the earth below move."

We must be deeply conscious and cognisant of the fact that our goal of accomplishing the task at hand to fundamentally reorganise the civil service also reinforces the relentless pursuit of our overarching national goal of ensuring the survival of our sovereign statehood. For it is indeed my most sacred mandate as the Druk Gyalpo to safeguard the glorious land of Palden Drukpa.

Therefore, I hereby issue this Kasho on the auspicious occasion of the 113th National Day in Punakha Dzong on 17th December 2020, corresponding to the Third Day of the Eleventh Month of the Male Iron Rat Year, in exercise of powers bestowed upon me by the Constitution to establish a Civil Service Reform Council. I entrust it with the profound responsibility of recommending to the Royal Government the directions for fundamentally restructuring the civil service so that it has a renewed vision for the twenty-first century.

In order to realise the vision, the civil service has to be grounded as a robust organisation that is apolitical, meritocratic, innovative, resilient, and driven by a culture of research and state-of-the-art technology, enabling legislations and indeed the highest ethical standards of its leaders and personnel. Only then will we be able to unleash our full potential and serve our people even better. It is my strong belief that a compact, efficient, and strong civil service remains the key to our nation's present and future wellbeing, security, and sovereignty. If we are able to do this, it will be one of our finest achievements and legacy.

The Druk Gyalpo

