The Role of Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in Bangladesh: A Study on Dynamics of the Policy Process

Abdur Rab
Post-Graduate Student
Department to Public Administration, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka-1342, Bangladesh

Abstract
Policy process has become a crux issue for development initiatives and governance process with huge population burden and political instability in Bangladesh. Bangladesh emerged as an independent country since 16th December, 1971. Prime Minister was the head of the government since independence of Bangladesh from 16th December, 1971 to 25th January, 1975. By the fourth amendment of the constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh passing on 25 January, 1975, Presidential form of government was introduced in the place of parliamentary form of government; one party system was familiarized in lieu of multi-party system. In addition to, the power of the Jatiya Sangsad were curtailed. By the amendment, President was the head of both the government and the state in the place of Prime Minister was the head of government. The Constitution of Bangladesh (1972) cites article 55 (1), "There shall be a Cabinet for Bangladesh having the Prime Minister at its head and comprising also such other Minister as the Prime Minister may from time to time designate". In addition to, the Twelfth amendment was passed in the parliament on 6th August, 1991 and restored parliamentary form of government and it is what the parliament it was before 25th January, 1975. Prime Minister is the head of the executive, presided over the cabinet (highest apex body of policy decisions), have power to abolish or construct a new ministry or division without consultation of other designated authority or parliament and head of the party. Furthermore, he has strong influence to formulate any public policy.
Keywords: Rules of Business, Public Policy, Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Policy Process, Cabinet.

Introduction

Policies are generally developed when there is a crisis. To formulate a policy in a traditional way, it covers 'decisions taken by those with responsibility for a given policy area, and these decisions usually take the form of statements or formal positions on an issue, which are then executed by the bureaucracy' (Keeley & Scoones, 2003:22). In this way 'Policy' can be hypothesized a liner process through stages of agenda setting, decision-making and, finally implementation and evaluation. Smith (1976) had noted that, "in practice policies generally consist of a broad course of action". Again Hill (1997) remarked policy as a "web of interrelated decisions that evolve over time during the process of implementation". According to Keely and Scoones (2003), 'Policy also needs to be seen as an inherently political process, rather than simply the instrumental execution of rational decisions'. To understand the policy process policy learning is the only way through. Lots of issues become as queries and questions on the way of understanding how the policy is made. The study tries to demonstrate how can the PMO office of Bangladesh plays role for policy formulation and how the concept of policy learning can assist in developing a better understanding of the policy making process.

Bangladesh emerged as an independent country since 1971. By the four amendment of the constitution, Presidential form of government was introduced in the place of parliamentary form of government; one party system was introduced and by the twelfth amendment, Parliamentary form of government restored. Through the twelfth amendment, the parliamentary form of government was reintroduced in Bangladesh. The president had become the constitutional head of the state and Prime Minister had become the executive or head of the government. The cabinet was headed by the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister and cabinet are collectively responsible to the Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament). The post of the Vice President was abolished. After 1991, the parliamentary form of democracy was restored.

The Constitution of Bangladesh (1972) cites article 55 (1), "There shall be a Cabinet for Bangladesh having the Prime Minister at its head and comprising also such other Minister as the Prime Minister may from time to time designate". In addition to, article 55 (2) also is obvious, 'The executive power of the Republic shall, in accordance with this Constitution, be exercised by or on the authority of the Prime Minister'. Furthermore, article 56 (1) also refers, There shall be Prime Minister, and such other Ministers, Ministers of State and Deputy Ministers as may be determined by the Prime Minister'. So, it is witnessed, from the statement, that Prime Minister is the head of the government as well as head of the executive along with the cabinet. Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has three branches for instance; Executive, Legislative and Judiciary. Prime Minister (PM) is the head of executive. Speaker of the parliament presides over the parliament or parliamentary secessions. Having PM is the head of ruling party; he is the leader of the ruling party at the parliament. So, in this case, Prime Minister has a vast influence to making a policy. PM is the head of cabinet and presided over the cabinet, an apex body of policy approval. There is need of cabinet approval before passing a law or ordinance in

the parliament. In addition to, Article 10 (7) of ROB cites, "If a Minister who has asked to see a case of another Ministry/Division desires any further action to be taken thereon, he shall consult the minister and action, mutually agreed upon, shall be taken. In the absence of agreement the case shall be submitted to the Prime Minister for decision". So, PM has enormous influence to policy.

Objectives:
In the absence of academic/research study on the PMO, it is difficult to clarify understand the real policy context, especially institutional (sometimes may be personal as well) interactions and its impact upon the policy management. PMO being at the center of the policy making process demands attention of the public policy scholars for undertaking in-depth study on the managerial and political economic aspects of the PMO's engagement in the overall policy process. This study intends to study are:

- The structural aspects of the PMO, i.e. administrative wings and sections of this Office along with their respective jurisdiction over part of the ROB 1996, category-wise manpower of each wing/section, names of the most frequently communicated institutions (ministries/divisions/departments) and reasons thereto, growth of this office in terms of manpower, budget and volume of work over the years, manpower deployment process in PMO.
- Procedural aspects of the PMO, i.e. comparison of ROBs of under the presidential and parliamentary systems (ROB of 1975 updated to 1990 and ROB 1996 updated to 2009), SOP of the PMO, role of advisors and communication pattern with the PM, flow chart of file processing of other ministries/divisions and mean lead time (calculated through sample mean of relatively faster, usual and slower files), types of feedback/decisions that PMO usually make on the files of other ministries/divisions.
- Conventional aspects of the PMO, i.e. conventions developed over time regarding setting policy priority under PMO's jurisdiction, interministerial bargaining via PMO, strategies followed by other ministry for better facilitation of files/interests through PMO, strategies practiced by the PMO for establishing administrative balance or influencing policy decisions.
- The main objective of the paper is to prepare a baseline study on PMO's policy making role so that students and scholars of public administration could undertake more advanced academic pursuits in future.

Methodology of the Study
The research study extends the influential role of Prime Minister in Bangladesh formulating public policies. To achieve such kind of purpose of study, qualitative approach has been adopted for the research work. In addition to, case study approach has been enriched of the research study. As Travers pointed out 'there are five main methods employed by qualitative researchers: observation, interviewing, ethnographic fieldworks, discourse analysis and textual analysis' (2002, p. 2), a case study can deal with most of these methods (Yin 1984, p. 51). So, this research study has adopted three qualitative methods, namely: discourse analysis, observation and textual analysis to explore all research questions. The 'ethnographic fieldwork' which requires a long time to complete has been discarded because of time constraints. Cho and Trent assert that 'qualitative research can be more credible as long as certain techniques, methods, and/or strategies are employed during the conduct of the inquiry'. (2006, p. 322).

While this research has studied multiple cases, some scientists advocate the single case study for in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Dyer & Wilkins 1991; Van-Maanen 1988). However, most other scientists have argued for multiple case-studies that enable a higher degree of findings and can establish a wider data analysis in the one context (Eisenhardt 1989, 1991). Qualitative approach has been applied to explore this research area to obtain a detailed understanding of the problem, because "the qualitative study is a particularly suitable methodology for dealing with critical problems of practice and extending the knowledge base of various aspects" (Merriam 1991, p. 54). The complexity and context of the research area are among the other concerns for selecting qualitative methodology. Guba and Lincoln asserted that 'qualitative methods are stressed within the naturalistic paradigm not because the paradigm is anti-quantitative but because qualitative methods come more easily to the human-as instrument' (2000, p. 200). Some researchers mentioned that a qualitative method is better than using quantitative in an illiterate or semi-literate developing society to overcome problems related to getting an in-depth knowledge of reality (Van der Reis; 2000).

Qualitative data was used in this study supplemented by quantitative data whenever appropriate. Secondary materials were gathered from different published sources such as, books, book chapters, articles, unpublished dissertations, newspapers, and internet browsing. Secondary data and both qualitative and quantitative data 'collected from different sources' were evaluated thoroughly to address the research objectives. Thus, effort was made to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in a single research and analysis of research objectives in a quantitative form and descriptive way that represents role of PMO in policy making process in Bangladesh.

Policy Making Process in Bangladesh:
Bangladesh is a developing country going through socio-political and economic changes. The political environment is often fractious and unstable. There are a multitude of socio-economic and governance challenges, including, corruption, high rates of poverty, and social inequality. Public policies in the developing countries retain certain peculiarities of their own by virtue of being influenced by an unstable socio-political environment, and face various difficulties and challenges. Poverty, malnutrition, ill health, illiteracy, low standards of living, unemployment and other common phenomena of these countries have also been creating a growing pessimism about the effectiveness of public policies. Public policy making is not merely a technical function of government; rather it is a complex collaborating process influenced by the diverse nature of socio-political and other environmental forces. In simple sense, 'policy' refers to a broad statement that reflects future goals and aspirations and provides guidelines for carrying out those goals. Hill (1993: p.47) defines 'policy' as 'the product of political influence, determining and setting limits to what the state does'. Public policy is a course of actions approved by government on methods of governance and systems of regulative methods including laws, regulations, administrative guidelines and procedures. Anderson's (2003:19,20) stage model which provides a theoretical framework for policy making process for instance;

Policy agenda ➡ **Policy Formulation** ➡ **Policy Adoption** ➡ **Policy Implementation** ➡ **Policy Evaluation.**

To formulate a policy, agenda must be identified on the context of priority of societal crisis or political manifestation of the ruling party or complexities arises at the government. To set an agenda, John Kingdon's established 'policy window model' where he has divided the process into three different streams, namely **problem, policy and politics** (Roger *et al.*,1981:100).
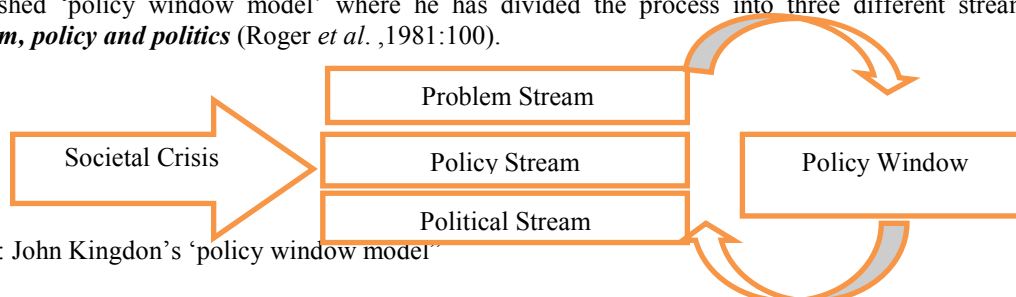

Figure: John Kingdon's 'policy window model'

Definitions of the concepts (based on Kingdon, 1995):
• A policy window may open when simultaneously a problem is recognized, a policy is available and the political context is positive for change:
• Problems are defined as public matters requiring attention, e.g. poor school results or increasing criminality.
• Policies are defined as proposals for change. The policies in this study were given from the start as each single case study describes a measure already in progress.
• Political processes are defined as policy-related local conditions, e.g. political intentions or earmarked financial support (implicit showing political desire).

When a societal crisis arises or issues emerge, a policy is to be formulated to overcome the societal crisis. After issue emergence or setting agenda, individual ministries or divisions or designated authorities formulate policies. For example; Ministry of Education is responsible for formulation of education policy, Ministry of Food is responsible for formulation of food policy etc. After formulation of policy, Approbation by the responsible authority must be required to execute the policy. Cabinet is the apex body of approbation of policy approval. Without prior approval of the policy, no policy can't pass in the parliament. Parliament is the highest policy making body of a country. National Parliament of Bangladesh is the highest policy making body of the country. After approval of cabinet, law, ordinance or policy submit to the parliament for approval by the majority MPs. If any policy or law is not approved by the cabinet, can't submit to the parliament for approval. If any policy that associated to one or more ministries or division, they must formulate policy with association of those ministries or division. After approbation of policy from cabinet and parliament, the policy may execute or implement by the concerned authorities. After implementation of policy, policy evaluation is required that weather the policy produces intended outcome or not. The certain authority is responsible for policy evaluation. The whole process is associated with some steps and approval of Prime Minister's Concern. If any policy that don't signify the election manifestation or ideology of the party, may reject the policy from the cabinet. So, from policy agenda to policy evaluation, every step is important and strong policy role by the certain ministry.

Discretionary power of Prime Minister in Bangladesh:
Cabinet is the apex policy making body of the government in Bangladesh. No policy can't pass without approbation of the cabinet. Rules of Business (ROB; 1996) cites article 4(11), "No important policy decision

shall be taken except with the approval of the Cabinet". Prime Minister has enormous power to constitute one or more ministry or division without consultation in the cabinet. ROB cites article 3(i), "The Prime Minister may, whenever necessary, constitute a Ministry consisting of one or more Divisions". In addition to, article 3(iii) of ROB cites, 'Each Division shall have a Secretary/Additional Secretary/Joint Secretary to Government and such other officials subordinate to him, as the Prime Minister may determine; Provided that the same person may be Secretary in more than one Division in the same Ministry". Article ROB 4(iv) cites that "The Prime Minister may assign a Division or a Ministry or more than one Division or one Ministry to the charge of the Prime Minister, a Minister or a Minister of State: Provided that a Division or Ministry not so assigned shall be in direct charge of the Prime Minister".

Furthermore, Ministers are responsible to the parliament or to the prime minister. Article 4(iv) of ROB refers, 'The Minister shall be responsible for conducting the business of his Ministry/Division in the Parliament unless otherwise directed by the Prime Minister". Every ministry or divisions has to consult any issues that are in muddle among ministries or divisions may submit to the Prime Minister. Article 10 of ROB (i), asserted, "When the subject of a case concerns more than one Ministry/Division no orders shall issue, nor shall the case be submitted to the Prime Minister or the Cabinet until it has been considered by all the Ministries/Divisions concerned and their views are properly recorded. Such consultation shall take place as early as may be practicable with the exact point of reference whereupon the opinion is sought for: Provided that in case of urgency and with the approval of the Prime Minister this requirement may be dispensed with, but the case shall, at the earliest opportunity thereafter, be brought to the notice of the Ministry/Division concerned". If any ministry or divisions can't take decision itself, may get decision from Prime minister after submitting cast to the Prime minister. Article 10 (ii) of ROB claimed that, "If the various Ministries/Divisions concerned cannot reach agreement, and the Minister, after consultation with other Ministers concerned, desires to press the case, it shall be submitted to the Prime Minister: Provided that where the case concerns a Ministry/Division which is under direct charge of the Prime Minister the final views of other Ministry/Division concerned shall be obtained before the case is submitted to the Prime Minister". Any cases that can mutually agree among different ministries, get mutually contact, agree on pact. But in the absence of agreement, it can be submit to the prime minister for decisions. Article 10 (7) of ROB cites that , "If a Minister who has asked to see a case of another Ministry/Division desires any further action to be taken thereon, he shall consult the minister and action, mutually agreed upon, shall be taken. In the absence of agreement the case shall be submitted to the Prime Minister for decision".

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh exercise enormous power than any other developed or developing countries. Comparing to the colonial king United Kingdom, Andre Mathiot, a shrewd analyst of the British Political System, has stated that present position of the British Prime Minister does not correspond to what lord Morley once defined it as 'Primus Inter Pares' and Sir William Harcourt as 'inter steals luna minors'. The British Prime Minister has turned out to be more than first among equals and virtually a sun around which other minor planets evolve. Yet it cannot be said, Andre Mathiot asserted, that the British Prim e Minister is free to determine policy just as he thinks fit. There are many constitutional conventions which provide an effective safeguard against any attempt at his autocratic personal rule. Firs and foremost are the basic principles of parliamentary government itself. Then he must abide by the political convention in regard to the sovereign for instance the king or queen. Theoretically the cabinet is still an informal gathering of "His/Her Majesty's trusted servants". Lastly, no prime minister can exercise personal supervision over the entire range of departmental activities. Rather does it to a large extent through his colleagues in the government. The British prime minister for all that has grown to be a powerful potentate but less and an autocrat.

Major Function of Prime Minister's Office

- Provide secretarial assistance to the Honorable Prime Minister in discharging her duties and responsibilities related to political, administrative, parliamentary affairs and other related functions;
- Liaise with international organizations and execute treaties and agreements with different countries and international organizations related to the functions of the Prime Minister's Office;
- Ensure security of the Honorable Prime Minister and arrange protocol and ceremonial events for different Heads of State and Heads of Government, dignitaries and foreign delegates;
- Undertake special programs for small ethnic community living in the plain lands in order to improve their socio-economic condition;
- Rehabilitate the homeless, impoverished, poor and vulnerable families by providing ownership over homestead under Ashrayan Project;
- Coordinate with stakeholders regarding activities related to NGO Affairs Bureau;
- Coordinate matters relating to Board of Investment (BOI), Export Processing Zone (EPZ), Private Export Processing Zone, Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority (BEZA) and Privatization Commission;

Dynamics of Policy Process at Prime Minster office (MPO):

Prime Minister of Bangladesh is the head of both executive and ruling party. In addition to, every policy is required to approval of cabinet. So, Prime Minister is the head of cabinet. So, he has to concern of every policy and everything what is happing in the ministries or divisions. In addition to, after performing all his duties of Prime Minister, he has also performed duties as a party chief. So, he exercises enormous power. There are some dynamics that reduce burden of extra-duties of Prime Minister in Bangladesh.

- *Delegation of power:* The power and function that he exercises may delegate to the certain person that Prime Minister can concentrate on the other issues properly. The best example of delegation of power is that delegate the power or responsibility to another person of Ministry of Public Administration. After the restoration of parliamentary democracy, Ministry of Public Administration is responsible to the Prime Minister. But this is the first time that he delegates the responsibilities of Ministry of Public Administration to another person. Prime Minister is mainly responsible to some ministries for instance; Ministry of Children and Women affairs, Ministry of Power, energy and mineral resources, Ministry of Religious etc. Prime Minstar of Bangladesh exercise power and responsibilities of more than five ministries and division. In addition to, he performs duties as a party chief. He can delegate of power and responsibilities to others. He can perform mostly one or two ministry.

- Prime Minister is not always party chief or Party chief is not always Prime Minister in Bangladesh. Anyone can be party chief and nominate anyone for Prime Minster. If the party wins in the election, the party can nominate for prime minister. For example: Indian system of politics and election.

Conclusion

Prime Minster in Bangladesh can exercise enormous power than any other Prime Minister or head of the government in the world. Reducing discretionary power of Prime Minister, balance of power among ministers, decentralization of decision making power of Prime Minister, becoming self-dependent of each ministry, enjoy financial freedom of making decision, speedy smooth flow of work and exercise independent authority of administrative officer are the challenges and prospectus of Ministries. Through delegation of power, Prime minister can delegate power, function, duties and responsibilities to others by which Prime Minister can concentrate on development progress and implementation of election manifestation. The ultimate result of all government functions is to betterment of people that promise by the government.

Reference

Constitution (1972), Constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh, International Relation and security Network,

Dyer, WG & Wilkins, AL (1991), 'Better Stories not Better Constructs, to Generate Better Theory: A Rejoinder to Eisenhardt', *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 613-9.

Eisenhardt, KM (1989), 'Building Theory from Case Study Research', *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 532-50.

Keeley, J. & Scoones, I., (2003) 'Understanding Environmental Policy Process', p. 22. Earthscan: UK.

ROB, (2012), Rules of Business 1996, Cabinet Division, People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Yin, RK (1984), *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* SAGE Publications Ltd, London.

Cho, J & Trent, A 2006, 'Validity in Qualitative Research Revisited', *Qualitative Research*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 319-40.