

You can't be SERIOUS - Government efficiency

Congress MLA from Qila Raipur constituency, Jassi Khangura, has suggested initiation of "efficiency audit for all departments," to be measured by financial efficiency, key performance indicators (KPIs) and the key result areas (KRAs). Through a communication to the State Finance and Planning Minister Manpreet Badal, the legislator suggested that in addition to his current responsibilities the former should be made responsible for the financial efficiency of all departments. He observed, "Departmental funding statements should be accompanied with specified commitments to improve financial efficiency"

Punjab Finance and Planning Minister Manpreet Badal has welcomed a Congress legislator's call for an efficiency audit of all departments of the state government

At a news conference here today, Manpreet Badal told the press that he welcomed all suggestions aimed at providing better governance for Punjab no matter from where these suggestions emanated

Referring to the "distinguished Member" from Qila Raipur, Badal said: "I am always happy to see someone applying his mind to important issues. Only last week I read a news item that reported Mr Khangura's letter to the Prime Minister in which he urged his respected leader's good self to consider reintroduction of double member constituencies - in other words voters of one constituency elect two representative. This measure would enable the Lok Sabha to have reserved seats for women without reducing the election opportunities of male politicians - rather like a college meeting its reserved quota obligations by creating seats for more students. He believes this is the way to blunt opposition to the Women's Reservation Bill, and of course provide more opportunities for perks, porkbarrel and full lifetime pension to politicians. The proposal shows a fresh and original mind at work

"Having advocated Lok Sabha two-fer-ones, now Mr Khangura has turned his attention to the problem of wasteful duplication in government.

Although the suggestion has come from an Opposition Member, we are on the same side in our desire to improve state government efficiency." The minister declared that he was impressed with the idea of efficiency audit. "I immediately recorded my favourable comments on Mr Khangura's letter and put it before the Chief Minister. The CM also reacted positively and issued instructions to the Chief Secretary to require all Secretaries in charge of departments, or overseeing Boards, Corporations or Directorates to forward 10 names per department of persons suitable for commissions to undertake efficiency audit and simultaneously investigate the causes of, and possible solutions for, government inefficiency.

They have told to submit these names not later than August 31. Thereafter the CM himself in consultation with Cabinet colleagues, will finalise the

lists. Additionally, Efficiency Commissions will be set up in every district. I have been asked to make a preliminary budget for this work which I have been asked to submit by October 31." The plan, as outlined by the minister, calls for each departmental and district commission to assess and report financial efficiency, key performance indicators and the key result areas. The commissions will also be empowered to hear testimony from any member of the public who feels that he has been made to suffer on account of government inefficiency.

At the conclusion of the study, a super-commission will amalgamate the reports of the departmental and district commissions and their report with recommendations will be placed before the Vidhan Sabha for debate. After incorporating suggestions from the Members, the report with addenda will be sent to the Legal Remembrancer who will prepare comprehensive legislation to make government efficient

The term of these commissions is presently being projected up to 2025 (extendable to 2035) and they are likely to cost an estimated Rs 80 crore per year.

In a related development, later the same day, Punjab Education Minister Upinderjit Kaur announced that the state-level empowered committee constituted last month to ensure proper implementation of Punjabi language in all offices of state government would also be actively associated with the Efficiency Commissions

The minister informed that all documents of the Efficiency Commissions would be in Punjabi only. "I have already begun compiling a list of important efficiency-related English phrases that will need Punjabi equivalents," she said, citing as examples such phrases as organizational performance manager toolkit, performance target reporting external validation, on-demand, real-time scorecard measure, customized cost-savings document, flexible data-input modes, and key success indicator. The minister was confident that phrases that make little sense even in the original language will be crystal clear in Punjabi.

In a pressnote, the office of the Chief Minister, announced that the 7th Session (Budget) of the 13th Vidhan Sabha is to conclude on July 7. The Session was initially to scheduled continue up to July 11. The government has decided to curtail the Session as a token of the Akali Government's strong commitment to efficiency and curbing unnecessary financial outlay

"By paring down the legislative process to bare essentials, the government believes that it can skim through the main heads and highlights, do away with additional presentations and questions, take a vote and pass the whole thing and wind up by July 7. The reduced Session will not only be more efficient, it will save the taxpayers approximately Rs 108 lakh - the cost of four days Vidhan Sabha sitting calculated at the rate of Rs 27 lakh per day."