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তারিখঃ ২৪ আগস্ট ২০২৫

বিষয়: National Enquiry Point (NEP) for Trade এর Operational Guideline প্রেরণ প্রসঙ্গে

উপর্যুক্ত বিষয় প্রেক্ষিতে জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, National Enquiry Point for Trade সুষ্ঠুভাবে পরিচালনার নিমিত্ত প্রস্তুতকৃত Operational Guideline-টি পরবর্তী প্রয়োজনীয় কার্যক্রম গ্রহণের জন্য ১ (এক) কপি নির্দেশক্রমে প্রেরণ করা হলো।



২৪.৮.২৫

(শরীফ মোস্তাফিজুর রহমান)

উপসচিব

মোবাইল- ০১৭১৩০৪৫৭৯৫

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বিতরণ (জ্যেষ্ঠতার ক্রমানুসারে নয়):

১. নির্বাহী চেয়ারম্যান, বাংলাদেশ বিনিয়োগ উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষ, শেরে-ই-বাংলা নগর, আগারগাঁও, ঢাকা।
২. গভর্নর, বাংলাদেশ ব্যাংক, মতিঝিল, ঢাকা।
৩. সিনিয়র সচিব, সুরক্ষা সেবা বিভাগ, স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রণালয়, বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।
৪. সিনিয়র সচিব, সড়ক পরিবহন ও মহাসড়ক বিভাগ, সড়ক ও সেতু মন্ত্রণালয়, বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।
৫. সচিব, অর্থ বিভাগ, অর্থ মন্ত্রণালয়, বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।
৬. চেয়ারম্যান, জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড, রাজস্ব ভবন, এফ ১/এ, আগারগাঁও, শেরে-ই-বাংলা নগর, ঢাকা।
৭. চেয়ারম্যান, বাংলাদেশ ট্রেড এন্ড ট্যারিফ কমিশন, ১২ তলা সরকারি অফিস ভবন, সেগুনবাগিচা, ঢাকা।
৮. সচিব, তথ্য ও যোগাযোগ প্রযুক্তি বিভাগ, বিসিসি ভবন আগারগাঁও, ঢাকা।
৯. সচিব, শিল্প মন্ত্রণালয়, শিল্প ভবন, ৯১, মতিঝিল, ঢাকা।
১০. চেয়ারম্যান, বাংলাদেশ টেলিযোগাযোগ নিয়ন্ত্রন কমিশন, আইইবি ভবন (৫ম, ৬ষ্ঠ ও ৭ম তলা), রমনা, ঢাকা।
১১. নির্বাহী চেয়ারম্যান, বাংলাদেশ রপ্তানি প্রক্রিয়াজাতকরণ অঞ্চল কর্তৃপক্ষ, বেপজা কমপ্লেক্স, ধানমন্ডি, ঢাকা।
১২. চেয়ারম্যান, বাংলাদেশ চা বোর্ড, নাসিরাবাদ, চট্টগ্রাম।
১৩. মহাপরিচালক, বাংলাদেশ স্ট্যান্ডার্ড এন্ড টেস্টিং ইনস্টিটিউট (বিএসটিআই), মান ভবন, ১১৬/ক, তেজগাঁও শিল্প এলাকা, ঢাকা।
১৪. প্রধান নিয়ন্ত্রক, আমদানি ও রপ্তানি প্রধান নিয়ন্ত্রকের দপ্তর, জাতীয় ক্রীড়া পরিষদ ভবন, ১৬ তলা, ৬২/৩ পুরানা পল্টন, ঢাকা।
১৫. চেয়ারম্যান, বাংলাদেশ স্থল বন্দর কর্তৃপক্ষ, টিসিবি ভবন, কাওরান বাজার, ঢাকা।
১৬. মহাপরিচালক, মৎস্য অধিদপ্তর, মৎস্য ভবন, ঢাকা।
১৭. মহাপরিচালক, ঔষুধ প্রশাসন অধিদপ্তর, ঔষুধ ভবন, মহাখালী, ঢাকা।
১৮. মহাপরিচালক, জাতীয় ভোক্তা অধিকার সংরক্ষণ অধিদপ্তর।
১৯. প্রধান নির্বাহী কর্মকর্তা, বিএফটিআই, টিসিবি ভবন, (৫ম তলা) ১ কাওরান বাজার, ঢাকা।
২০. ভাইস চেয়ারম্যান, রপ্তানি উন্নয়ন ব্যুরো, কারওয়ান বাজার, ঢাকা।
২১. মহাপরিচালক, কৃষি সম্প্রসারণ অধিদপ্তর, খামার বাড়ী, ফার্মগেট, ঢাকা।
২২. মহাপরিচালক, পরিবেশ অধিদপ্তর, আগারগাঁও, ঢাকা।
২৩. চেয়ারম্যান, চট্টগ্রাম বন্দর কর্তৃপক্ষ, চট্টগ্রাম।
২৪. চেয়ারম্যান, মংলা বন্দর কর্তৃপক্ষ, মোংলা, বাগেরহাট।

২৫. চেয়ারম্যান, বীমা উন্নয়ন ও নিয়ন্ত্রণ কর্তৃপক্ষ, সাধারণ বীমা কর্পোরেশন টাওয়ার, ৩৭/এ দিলকুশা, মতিঝিল, বা/এ, ঢাকা।
২৬. নিবন্ধক, যৌথমূলধন কোম্পানী ও ফার্মসমূহের পরিদপ্তর, টিসিবি ভবন, ১ কাওরান বাজার, ঢাকা।
২৭. প্রধান বিজ্ঞোক্তক পরিদর্শক, বিজ্ঞোক্তক পরিদপ্তর, সেগুন বাগিচা, ঢাকা।
২৮. প্রধান বয়লার পরিদর্শক, প্রধান বয়লার পরিদর্শকের কার্যালয়, শিল্প ভবন-৯১, মতিঝিল বা/এ, ঢাকা।
২৯. চেয়ারম্যান, বাংলাদেশ পারমানবিক শক্তি কমিশন, ই-১২/এ, শেরে-বাংলানগর, আগারগাঁও, ঢাকা।
৩০. চেয়ারম্যান, বাংলাদেশ পরমাণু শক্তি নিয়ন্ত্রণ কর্তৃপক্ষ, শেরে বাংলা নগর, আগারগাঁও, ঢাকা।
৩১. চেয়ারম্যান, ট্রেডিং কর্পোরেশন অব বাংলাদেশ, টিসিবি ভবন, কাওরান বাজার, ঢাকা।
৩২. চেয়ারম্যান, নিরাপদ খাদ্য কর্তৃপক্ষ, বিএসএল অফিস কমপ্লেক্স (হোটেল ইন্টারকন্টিনেন্টাল ঢাকা-এর পার্শ্বে), ভবন-২, ১৯৯ কাজী নজরুল ইসলাম সড়ক, ঢাকা।
৩৩. ব্যবস্থাপনা পরিচালক, এসএমই ফাউন্ডেশন, পর্যটন ভবন (লেভেল:৬-৭), ই-৫সি/১, আগারগাঁও প্রশাসনিক এলাকা, শেরে-ই- বাংলা নগর, ঢাকা-১২০৭।
৩৪. প্রশাসক, এফবিসিসিআই, ৬০ মতিঝিল বাগিচায়িক এলাকা, ঢাকা।
৩৫. প্রেসিডেন্ট, বাংলাদেশ ইন্টারন্যাশনাল চেম্বার অব কমার্স (আইসিসি), সুবাস্তু টাওয়ার, ৬৯/১ পাছপথ, ঢাকা।
৩৬. প্রেসিডেন্ট, বাংলাদেশ পোষাক প্রস্তুত কারক ও রপ্তানিকারক সমিতি অ্যাসোসিয়েশন (বিজিএমইএ), কারওয়ান বাজার, ঢাকা।
৩৭. প্রেসিডেন্ট, বিকেএমএমএ, বিকেএমএমএ টাওয়ার, (১৩ তলা), ১৩/এ সোনারগাঁও রোড, বাংলামোটর, ঢাকা।
৩৮. প্রেসিডেন্ট, এমসিসিআই, ১২২-১২৪, মতিঝিল বা/এ, ঢাকা।
৩৯. প্রেসিডেন্ট, ঢাকা চেম্বার অব কমার্স এ্যান্ড ইন্ডাস্ট্রি (ডিসিসিআই), ডিসিসিআই বিল্ডিং, মতিঝিল বা/এ, ঢাকা।

অনুলিপিঃ

- ১। সচিব মহোদয়ের একান্ত সচিব, বাগিচা মন্ত্রণালয়, বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা
- ২। অতিরিক্ত সচিবের ব্যক্তিগত কর্মকর্তা, ডব্লিউটিও অনুবিভাগ, বাগিচা মন্ত্রণালয়, বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা
- ২। যুগ্মসচিবের ব্যক্তিগত সহকারী, ডব্লিউটিও-৩ অধিশাখা, বাগিচা মন্ত্রণালয়, ঢাকা।
- ৩। অফিস কপি।

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR NATIONAL ENQUIRY POINT FOR TRADE (NEPT)

Final Draft

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1. Introduction

The National Enquiry Point for Trade (NEPT) is a government-established platform under the Ministry of Commerce that serves to connect the business community, trade officials, standards officials, regulators and any other domestic and international traders, in all matters relating to trade enquiries. It also implements the transparency provisions of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). The NEPT is now being operated virtually through a web-based system by the Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project-1, jointly financed by the Government of Bangladesh and the World Bank.

The obligation to establish enquiry points by member states of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is contained in different WTO agreements, such as Article 1 of the TFA, and Annex B of the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures.

This operational guideline provides an overview of about the legal background, administration of web-based national enquiry point, and instructions to the administrators and implementing organizations in addressing enquiries received from stakeholders. It also provides brief instructions to the focal point officials of participating institutions about their information-sharing mechanism.

The users of this guide are encouraged to consider some points when using it. The NEPT for Trade manages information relevant to trade queries of all the relevant agencies. It is also related to the WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Enquiry Point and Technical Barrier to Trade (TBT) Enquiry Point. However, the focal point officials of NEPT at the agency level may also serve as the focal point of other enquiry points. This guide is intended as a prescriptive of how things should be done to effectively implement the transparency provisions of the WTO agreements with a view to providing real-time information.

2. Objectives of the National Enquiry Points for Trade (NEPT)

The main objective of the enquiry point is to facilitate the timely dissemination of easily accessible, precise, and complete information to interested parties, contributing to the predictability of trade between WTO members, and responding promptly to reasonable enquiries from interested parties. The enquiry points officials act as focal persons for trade information in agencies and assist the traders in making decisions based on updated information critical to trade.

The services of the enquiry points are especially important for exporters, importers, or enterprises, allowing them to participate in domestic and international trade. Such enterprises often have no resources to find accurate information about international trade procedures, as such information is not made easily accessible. Information can be made available via the Internet, through the websites of relevant regulatory agencies and trade portals or enquiry points set up to respond to reasonable enquiries from governments, traders and other interested parties.

3. Establishment of the National Enquiry Point for Trade (NEPT)

The National Enquiry Point for Trade (NEPT) was established by the Ministry of Commerce in 2018. It has been made operational with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Commerce and the relevant public and private sector agencies for sharing trade information. The institutional responsibility for managing the NEPT lies with the Enquiry Point for TFA at the Ministry of Commerce and the Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project-1, Ministry of Commerce will continue to support the NEPT till the completion of the project.

The agencies that signed the MoU with the Ministry of Commerce must share their relevant information with NEPT as soon as any changes take place or a new regulation emerges and respond to queries from governments, traders, and other interested parties in an electronic format or in a machine-readable format through NEPT. The agencies agreed to nominate a responsible officer as the point of contact for all matters relating to MoU, and the parties agreed to communicate promptly with each other to disseminate the relevant trade-related information.

The Government of Bangladesh has established this web-based Enquiry Point for providing trade information to stakeholders under the Bangladesh Trade Portal (BTP). It will be managed through a pool of experts comprising one National Trade Expert, one Data Management Consultant, and one Focal Person Coordinator. Currently, the support is being provided from the Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project-1, Ministry of Commerce Component (BRCP-1).

The agencies that signed the MoU are supposed to officially nominate a Focal Point and alternate Focal Point for this national-level enquiry point. It is agreed that the agencies will ensure that the enquiry point at MoC, is formally notified about who are the concerned officers. Notifications will include details about the Name, Designation, Address, E-mail, and Phone numbers. BRCP-1, on behalf of the MoC, will maintain a log of information received from the agencies. NEPT forwards the queries to the Focal Points, in an agreed electronic format, promptly on receipt of such enquiry. The NEPT and the project also convenes meetings periodically to discuss operational issues relating to the BTP. More frequent meetings may be held where operational issues (e.g., site upgradation, development of new content areas) require further support.

4. Legal Background of Enquiry Point

The establishment and operation of the Enquiry Point are embedded in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement as well as in the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. The establishment of this enquiry point is also consistent with the Right to Information Act, 2009 of the government. The relevant Article of WTO TFA, SPS Agreement, and Right to Information Act, 2009 is given below:

WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement

1.2 Information Available Through Internet

1.2.1 Each Member shall make available, and update to the extent possible and as appropriate, the following through the internet:

- (a) a description (1) of its procedures for importation, exportation, and transit, including procedures for appeal or review, that informs governments, traders, and other interested parties of the practical steps needed for importation, exportation, and transit;
- (b) the forms and documents required for importation into, exportation from, or transit through the territory of that Member;
- (c) contact information on its enquiry point(s).

1.2.2 Whenever practicable, the description referred to in subparagraph 2.1(a) shall also be made available in one of the official languages of the WTO.

1.2.3 Members are encouraged to make available further trade-related information through the internet, including relevant trade-related legislation and other items referred to in paragraph 1.1.

Article 1.3. Enquiry Points

1.3.1 Each Member shall, within its available resources, establish or maintain one or more enquiry points to answer reasonable enquiries of governments, traders, and other interested parties on matters covered by paragraph 1.1 and to provide the required forms and documents referred to in subparagraph 1.1(a).

1.3.2 Members of a customs union or involved in regional integration may establish or maintain common enquiry points at the regional level to satisfy the requirement of paragraph 1.3.1 for common procedures.

1.3.3 Members are encouraged not to require the payment of a fee for answering enquiries and providing required forms and documents. If any, Members shall limit the amount of their fees and charges to the approximate cost of services rendered.

1.3.4 The enquiry points shall answer enquiries and provide the forms and documents within a reasonable time set by each Member, which may vary depending on the nature or complexity of the request.

Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, Annex B

Enquiry points

Each Member shall ensure that one enquiry point exists which is responsible for the provision of answers to all reasonable questions from interested Members as well as for the provision of relevant documents regarding:

- (a) any sanitary or phytosanitary regulations adopted or proposed within its territory;
- (b) any control and inspection procedures, production and quarantine treatment, pesticide tolerance and food additive approval procedures, which are operated within its territory;
- (c) risk assessment procedures, factors taken into consideration, as well as the determination of the appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection;
- (d) the membership and participation of the Member, or of relevant bodies within its territory, in international and regional sanitary and phytosanitary organizations and systems, as well as in bilateral and multilateral agreements and arrangements within the scope of this Agreement, and the texts of such agreements and arrangements.

WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade

Article 10:

10.1 Each Member shall ensure that an enquiry point exists which is able to answer all reasonable enquiries from other Members and interested parties in other Members as well as to provide the relevant documents regarding:

10.1.1 any technical regulations adopted or proposed within its territory by central or local government bodies, by non-governmental bodies which have legal power to enforce a technical regulation, or by regional standardizing bodies of which such bodies are members or participants;

10.1.2 any standards adopted or proposed within its territory by central or local government bodies, or by regional standardizing bodies of which such bodies are members or participants;

10.1.3 any conformity assessment procedures, or proposed conformity assessment procedures, which are operated within its territory by central or local government bodies, or by non-governmental bodies which have legal power to enforce a technical regulation, or by regional bodies of which such bodies are members or participants;

10.1.4 the membership and participation of the Member, or of relevant central or local government bodies within its territory, in international and regional standardizing bodies and conformity assessment systems, as well as in bilateral and multilateral arrangements within the scope of this Agreement; it shall also be able to provide reasonable information on the provisions of such systems and arrangements;

10.1.5 the location of notices published pursuant to this Agreement, or the provision of information as to where such information can be obtained; and

10.1.6 the location of the enquiry points mentioned in paragraph 3.

Right to Information Act, 2009

Article 4. Right to information. —Subject to the provisions of this Act, every citizen shall have the right to information from the authority, and the authority shall, on demand from a citizen, be bound to provide him with the information.

Article 6. Publication of information—

(1) Every authority shall publish and publicize all information pertaining to any decision taken, proceeding, or activity executed or proposed by indexing them in such a manner as may easily be accessible to the citizens.

(2) In publishing and publicizing information under sub-section (1), no authority shall conceal any information or limit its easy access.

(3) Every authority shall publish a report every year which shall contain the following information, namely:—

(a) particulars of its organizational structure, activities, responsibility of the officers and employees, or description and process of decision making;

(b) lists of all laws, Acts, Ordinance, rules, regulations, notifications, directives, manuals, etc. of the authority including the classification of all information lying with the authority;

(c) description of the terms and conditions under which a citizen may get services from the authorities in obtaining any license, permit, grant, consent, approval or other benefits and of such conditions that require the authority to make transactions or enter into agreements with him;

(d) particulars of the facilities ensuring right to information of the citizens, and the full name, designation, address, and, in cases where applicable, fax number and e-mail address of the assigned officer.

(4) If the authority frames any policy or takes any important decision, it shall publish all such policies and decisions and shall, if necessary, explain the reasons and causes in support of such policies and decisions.

(5) The report prepared by authority under this section shall be made available free of charge for public information and its copies shall be stocked for sale at nominal price.

(6) All the publications made by the authority shall be made available to the public at reasonable price.

(7) The authority shall publish and publicize the matters of public interest through press note or through any other means.

(8) The Information Commission shall, by regulations, frame instructions to be followed by the authority for publishing, publicizing and obtaining information and all the authority shall follow them.

The provisions of the Right to Information Act, 2009 support the disclosure of information as well as providing required information against any query. This is fully consistent and aligned with the provisions of WTO agreements and obligations of member states.

5. Scope of the National Enquiry Point for Trade (NEPT)

The National Enquiry Point for Trade (NEPT) will answer all queries relevant to trade received from any government agency, individual traders, institutions, or any interested person. It is relevant to the publication of information related to international trade. This information shall include, among others, a description of procedures, steps, guidelines, policies needed for import, export, and transit and administration of tariff quotas etc.

The queries will include, but not limited to, the following issues:

- the format for describing procedures based on the domestic legal framework;
- forms and documents required for import, export, and transit;
- publication of legal acts and administrative rules concerning rules of origin of goods, import, export, or transit restrictions or prohibitions, penalty provisions for breaches of import, export, or transit formalities;
- bilateral or multilateral agreements concerning import, export, or transit including enquiries regarding cross-border movements of goods;
- Other related issues.

6. Operational Procedures for Answering Queries

This section illustrates the procedure to be followed by the Enquiry Point and the Focal Points and their agencies in responding to the queries received from traders and other stakeholders. The procedure is described as a step-by-step process and will be coordinated by the NEPT on behalf of the Ministry of Commerce. Under the guidance of the National Trade Expert, the Focal Point Coordinator liaises with the agency-specific Focal Points.

Generally, all the Focal Points will directly upload all the new regulations and amended regulations to the BTP with information to the NEPT. The Focal Point may discuss with the NEPT before uploading the regulation for greater clarity. It is the responsibility of the NEPT to collect all the new or amended regulations, administrative procedures or licensing requirements as it's ready-reference.

Upon receiving the queries via the National Enquiry Point, shall try to response them from its ready reference database. If the ready reference database does not have enough information, the queries will be forwarded to the focal points and the Focal Points, who may reply to the queries directly to the traders with a copy to the NEPT (and the Project Director, BRCP-1 for a certain period), through the system. The administrative structure and decision-making process for replying to queries are discussed below:

- Step 1: The querier must submit the query/question through the National Enquiry Point system online. The mandatory information to be provided on the form includes the name, email address, phone number and the query itself.
- Step 2: Once the query is received by the NEPT (BRCP-1, the Data Management Consultant forwards the query to Focal Person Coordinator for coordination with relevant focal points.
- Step 3: During the project period, the Focal Point Coordinator consults with the National Trade Expert, and the NEPT (Project Director of BRCP-1) about the nature, volume, and relevancy of the question(s) and forwards the query to the focal point and alternate focal point of the relevant agency. The queries are sent through the system, and e-mail notifications are also sent to relevant officials. If the questions are general in nature and do not require response from any specific agency, then NEPT (BRCP-1) will directly reply to the queries. However, if the question is irrelevant to Enquiry for Trade, then a courtesy reply will be provided to the querier.
- Step 4:
 - A. The focal point official prepares the response and replies to the querier through the BTP System, and a copy of the response is also sent to the National Enquiry Point system.
 - B. In preparing the response, the focal point official may need to consult its higher authority and take approval on the response contents.
 - C. If the query is general in nature and involves providing published documents, the focal point officials will send responses to the querier in intimation with his/her supervisory officials. However, if the response requires preparation/compilation of documents and/or assistance of intra-wing or inter-wing officials of the agency, the focal point official will coordinate the process in consultation with his/her immediate supervisor and collects necessary information.
 - D. S/he will then prepare a response and place it for approval of his immediate supervisor if the information/data/documents come from other officials of his/her wing.
 - E. The approval from agency heads will be sought through the immediate supervisor of the focal point officials if the prepared response has relevance to other wings of the agency. The querier may also be advised to consult the built-in FAQs in the Bangladesh Trade Portal. The most critical point in responding to queries is to prepare responses and get approval from the higher authorities of the agencies concerned. The focal point official will pursue its higher authority to

approve the draft responses and authorize the focal point to reply. For the ease of sending queries by the stakeholders and quick response to them, the NEPT system also has Android and IOS-based mobile apps and they are published both in the Google play store and app store. Mobile apps will create more opportunities to direct communication with the users and assist them in answering queries.

F. A general disclaimer should state: "The responses given by the BTP are not legally binding and the Focal Person or the NEPT shall not be made legally accountable for the response. The responses given through the BTP shall not be used in the court as an evidence for any case."

A process flow of the National Enquiry Point is provided in Annexure-1.

7. Roles and responsibility of the agencies and focal points

There are Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between the Ministry of Commerce (MoC) and trade-related institutions for information sharing. The agencies agreed to nominate two concerned officials as deputy focal point and primary point of contact. The MoU has provisions that the agencies will promptly communicate any matters or issues of importance arising from policies or management decisions of relevance to the information published on the Bangladesh Trade Portal and its consequential effect on the users. It is also agreed that the agencies will respond in an agreed electronic format to any enquiry from the users. Responses will be made promptly upon receipt of such enquiry, agencies' nominated concerned officers will have the necessary authority to confirm that information passed to the MoC can be published. A list of nominated officers will also be available on the NEPT website so that users may directly contact the relevant personnel, if needed.

A common group email and/or WhatsApp group may be formed for seamless communication and easy coordination among the focal points.

The agencies should take initiatives to embed the NEPT link on their website so that the visitors can be redirected to NEPT website and submit their queries, if any.

8. Query Response Processing Time

Requests should be processed and replied to within 1-5 working days. However, it will depend on the nature and volume of information to be provided against any specific query. The response processing time includes forwarding the questions from NEPT to relevant agencies and their reply to the information seeker(s). If there is any delay because of the complex nature of the query, the relevant focal point will send an interim reply stating that the response is being processed and will be sent as soon as it is ready.

The authority may conduct online survey in every six months to collect feedback from the users on the quality and the timeliness of the responses.

9. Financing the Enquiry Point

While the financing mechanism for the National Enquiry Point for Trade (NEPT) is an issue for its sustainable operation, the Ministry of Commerce established the NEPT under its World Bank-financed Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project-1. The officials and consultants engaged under the Bangladesh Trade Portal Component of BRCP-1 are entrusted to operate the NEPT through a mechanism coordinated by a Focal Point Coordinator. The BRCP-1 has a specific budget to meet the fixed costs such as labour compensations (hiring and remuneration of staff and consultants) and costs of information and communication technologies (telephone lines, Internet, computers). After the completion of the BRCP-1, the Ministry of Commerce shall assume financial responsibility for operating the National Enquiry Point for Trade (NEPT) and appoint relevant officials.

Currently, the NEPT and government agencies do not charge fees for responding to enquiries and providing requested forms and documents. The expenses for operating a virtual enquiry point and salaries and remuneration of consultants are being met through the government's development budget. Ministry of Commerce may collaborate with any agencies, to run the NEPT smoothly. If deemed required, the Ministry of Commerce may seek financial and technical support from development partners and/or private sector.

10. Sustainability of National Enquiry Point for Trade (NEPT)

While the MoC has been actively considering a mechanism for ensuring the sustainability of NEPT, the BRCP-1 also plans to build the capacity of agency-level officials for efficient and sustainable operation of the NEPT. There is a plan that relevant officials periodically (e.g., once in three months) review, jointly with relevant staff of other agencies providing information, the nature of incoming enquiries and the response templates, inform each other about changes in the legislation at the national and departmental level at least once in a quarter.

Training programs for enquiry point staff will focus on the following topics:

- General understanding of the WTO obligations and government's commitment as set out in national laws, regulations, and procedures;
- General understanding of the elements of the information, while enquiry point staff should know whom to contact if the enquiry goes beyond their competence;
- Good ability to organize and maintain a network of contacts involving relevant agencies to be able to give urgent responses to more specialized enquiries, and to ensure that information is kept up to date.

The NEPT staff will also periodically collect feedback from the private sector and other users of their services on the quality of work of the enquiry point and take measures to improve their functioning.

The MoC will also assist the relevant agencies in developing internal procedural guidelines to ensure the efficiency and sustainability of enquiry point functions and services. Technical assistance and experience-sharing to promote the application of best practices, as well as online tools and platforms will be used to address the coordination challenges.

the Ministry of Commerce will also organize regular meetings with persons responsible for information exchange, including persons responsible for enquiry points and notifications. Useful information on trade may also be accumulated in the form of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and shared with the National Enquiry Point Coordinating Ministry.

11. Use of Artificial Intelligence in NEPT

The NEPT operation is run based on available information at the agency level. The documents already prepared are used for replying to queries. There are few scopes for using artificial intelligence (AI) in this respect since there is a dearth of organized information banks. However, the NEPT is linked to a set of Frequently Asked Questions that may be linked to auto search options and may be used as a primary source of artificial intelligence. The Ministry of Commerce may use AI to sort queries and send them to relevant agencies automatically. However, using AI may require a strong database and integration of information with relevant systems, and it will be implemented in a few years.

12. Promotional Activities for Awareness Raising

Promotional activities give enquiry points an opportunity to increase visibility with potential and existing stakeholders by improving awareness of the services offered. One everyday promotional activity, for example, is a stakeholder training, and workshop. Another frequent undertaking involves the use of the internet, social media and databases, or combinations thereof, to disseminate information; less common is the use of brochures and pamphlets or even videos. Apart from using social media and workshop/seminars, the national level Enquiry Point may issue brochures and booklets containing information on objectives, contact details, information provided, and facilities offered on a regular basis.

13. Provision for Amendments

The Ministry of Commerce, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, may review and update the operational framework of NEPT as necessary to address emerging trade-related challenges, technological advancements, and regulatory changes.

Amendments may be required if a new version of the NEPT is developed. The post-project operation of the NEPT may also necessitate potential amendments.

14. Disclosure of Confidential Information

- **Confidential Information:** For the purposes of this guideline, "Confidential Information" means any and all information, whether in tangible or intangible form, that is disclosed by the concerned officials and is designated as "Confidential," or that other officials should reasonably understand to be confidential based on the nature of the information and the circumstances surrounding its disclosure.
- **Confidential obligations:** Officials shall use the same degree of care, but no less than a reasonable degree of care, to protect the Confidential Information from unauthorized use, disclosure, or publication as it used to protect its own confidential information of a similar nature. Officials shall not disclose, copy, reproduce, distribute, or use any Confidential Information except as necessary to fulfill the purpose of the disclosure.

- **Permitted Disclosures:** Officials may disclose Confidential Information to relevant stakeholders who have a need to know such information to fulfill the disclosure purpose. Officials, if needed to disclose any information to a third party other than the relevant stakeholders of this guidelines, may do so on written authorization from its authority and the WTO Wing, Ministry of Commerce.
- No legal suit, prosecution or any other legal proceeding shall lie against the National Enquiry Focal Points of Trade or the government on the ground that any person/ parties is affected or likely to be affected by anything which is done in good faith by National Enquiry Focal Points or Trade or the government under this guideline.

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Final Draft

Annexure-1

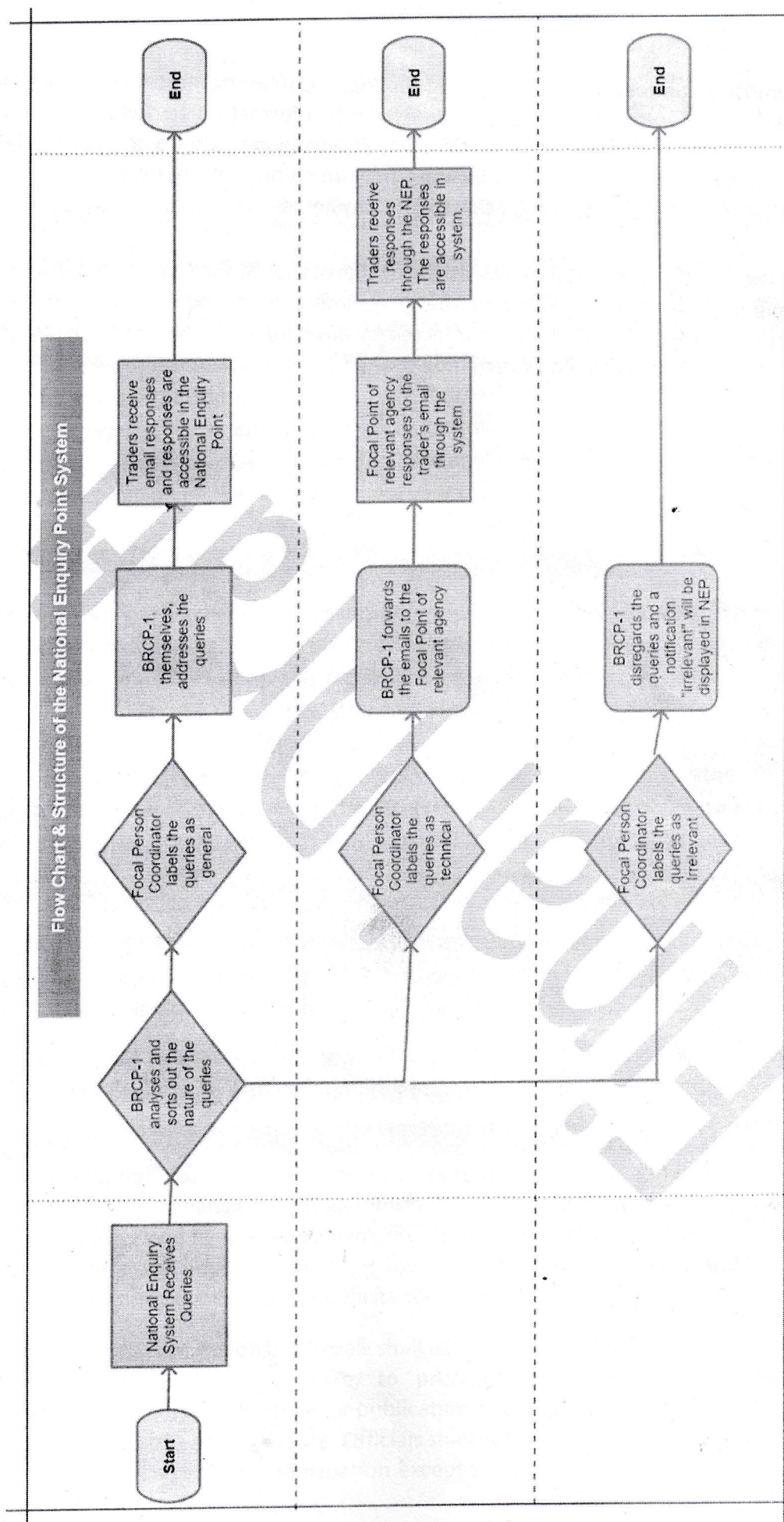


Fig: Flowchart representing the flow of information from the queriers to receiving of information through the NEPT system