

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

“EPADS 2.0 represents a significant shift towards a more transparent, data-driven, and digitally integrated public procurement system. By leveraging AI, standardized data, e-procurement, real-time monitoring, and interoperable platforms, the reforms aim to strengthen fiscal discipline, competition, accountability, and value for public money. The “One Nation, One System” approach seeks to harmonize procurement processes while preserving institutional and provincial autonomy, positioning procurement reform as an integral part of Pakistan’s broader digital and economic governance agenda.”



Hasnat Ahmed Qureshi

Managing Director

Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA)

ICMA: EPADS 2.0 has already saved PKR 20.52 billion in administrative costs. How can these efficiency gains be translated into long-term fiscal discipline and strategic value creation for Pakistan’s public sector, rather than remaining short-term savings?

Hasnat Ahmed: The real value of EPADS goes beyond the administrative savings of PKR 20.52 billion recorded in the fiscal year 2024-25. The figure represents the recurring benefits of digital procurement, not a one-off saving. EPADS has significant potential for savings in terms of contract cost, estimated up to 15 percent, compared to manual procurement. With EPADS 2.0, the institutionalization of structured procurement data, standardized procedures, increased transparency, and real-time monitoring will lay the basis for evidence-based decision-making and better procurement planning.

With EPADS 2.0, end to end integration covering contract management, commitment accounting, e invoicing, digital payments, and oversight dashboards will translate efficiency gains into long term fiscal discipline. Coupled with PPRA’s reform roadmap focusing on reducing

non-compliance and procurement cycle duration as well as strengthening competition, these measures will ensure sustainable value for money, better cost management, and strategic value creation in Pakistan’s public sector.

ICMA: The Five-Year Reform Roadmap envisions AI-based analytics and open contracting standards. What safeguards are being built to prevent algorithmic bias, data misuse, or exclusion of smaller vendors while pursuing digital transformation?

Hasnat Ahmed: PPRA approach is to adopt artificial intelligence gradually and responsibly. AI in EPADS is planned to be a support tool, in particular for analysis, risk identification and decision support, while the statutory decision on procurement will remain with the authorized officials and procurement committees. AI functionality will be subject to data quality assessment, human supervision, algorithmic transparency, cybersecurity, audibility, and an appropriate governance framework. At the same time, digital learning, helpdesk support, and transparent electronic processes will continue to facilitate participation by suppliers of different sizes and capacities.

ICMA: With new Procurement Rules introducing OCDS, third-party oversight, and independent grievance redressal, how will PPRA adapt global best practices to Pakistan's institutional realities to ensure reforms are truly transformative?

Hasnat Ahmed: PPRA's approach is to adopt international best practices while aligning them with Pakistan's legal, institutional, and operational framework. Alignment of EPADS data with the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) will make procurement information more structured, comparable, and accessible across the entire contracting cycle, enabling PPRA and other stakeholders to move from document-based oversight to data-driven monitoring.

The new Set of Public Procurement Rules, 2025 provides a third-party oversight mechanism which will introduce an additional layer of independent assurance, particularly for high-value and high-risk procurements. Independent grievance redressal is equally important in building stakeholders' confidence. The objective is to provide suppliers with a fair, timely, and credible opportunity to lodge complaints against procurement decisions. This reflects established international principles of independent review and adequate remedies.

However, the real transformation will come from implementation rather than regulation alone. While moving a step forward, PPRA has already notified a pool of independent experts who will facilitate third-party oversight and independent grievance redressal. Approval of the new Set of PP Rules 2025 will further help to implement these mechanisms in real terms.

PPRA has aligned its regulatory framework with global best practice following international standards of transparency, accountability, and competition, combined with professionalization of procurement professionals and development of digital e-procurement infrastructure. PPRA's transformation journey is not just focused on following rules and regulations but on making public procurement more transparent, competitive, effective, accountable, and able to deliver value for public money.

ICMA: The vision of 'One Nation, One System' suggests centralization of procurement under a unified digital platform. How will PPRA ensure that this centralization enhances transparency and accountability without stifling institutional autonomy or innovation across diverse agencies?

Hasnat Ahmed: 'One Nation, One System' is intended to provide a common national digital procurement framework, not to centralize procurement decisions. EPADS standardizes processes, data, and transparency requirements, while procurement planning, specifications, evaluation, and contract management remain the responsibility of the respective Procuring Agencies and competent authorities.

EPADS is already implemented in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and it has demonstrated that "One Nation, One System" principle promotes national harmonization without jeopardizing institutional or provincial autonomy. Provinces have successfully utilized

EPADS for thousands of procurement transactions worth billions, while continuing to operate under their own procurement laws and regulatory frameworks.

Therefore, PPRA is focusing on a unified e-procurement system, not centralized decision-making. EPADS enhances transparency, interoperability, and accountability while allowing institutions and provinces to retain their respective mandates and autonomy.

ICMA: What frameworks are being considered to ensure interoperability of procurement data across ministries, provinces, and international partners?

Hasnat Ahmed: PPRA is pursuing interoperability through standardized, machine-readable procurement data, secure APIs, and alignment with recognized standards such as OCDS. EPADS can serve as the authoritative operational source for procurement data generated through the system, while information originating from other government institutions can continue to be verified from the respective authoritative source. EPADS is already integrated with FBR, NADRA, SECP, PEC, FABS, PRAs and DRAP, while oversight dashboards support data sharing with regulatory and accountability bodies, which facilitates reliable data exchange, registration of vendors/suppliers, and promotes transparency and accountability. This architecture also facilitates interoperability with provincial systems and will enable MDBs' procurement in future. Lastly, PPRA is also closely coordinating with Pakistan Digital Authority for this purpose.

ICMA: The Committee emphasized aligning reforms with the URAAN Pakistan programme. How will PPRA ensure that procurement reforms are not siloed but integrated into the wider economic governance agenda?

Hasnat Ahmed: Public procurement is a critical component of economic and fiscal governance because it determines how public resources are translated into goods, works, and services. PPRA Reform, particularly EPADS, is a flagship reform initiative of the Government of Pakistan and top priority agenda of the Prime Minister's Economic Governance Reform Program. This initiative is also aligned with the Digital Pakistan Vision of the Prime Minister to strengthen transparency, accountability, and efficiency in public procurement. In addition, national digital transformation frameworks such as the Digital Nation Pakistan Act 2025 and the 5E Governance Framework position procurement reform as a model for broader public sector modernization. PPRA reforms are also guided by global best practices, including insights from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. PPRA therefore views PPRA Reforms and EPADS as part of the broader digital-government ecosystem rather than a standalone procurement application.

The Editorial Board thanks Mr. Hasnat Ahmed Qureshi, Managing Director, Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) for sparing his precious time to give an exclusive interview for Chartered Management Accountant Journal.