



EVOLUTION OF SECRETARIAT

- In India, before 1935, the Governor-General had a private secretary, who provided secretarial assistance to him as well as to his Executive Council.
- Lord Wellington who was the Governor-General, between (1931-1936) used to have his private secretary attend meetings of cabinet & record the proceedings.
- Sir Eric Coates was the first Cabinet Secretary in pre-independence India, but his designation was of the Secretary to the Viceroy's Executive Council.
- After Independence, we adopted a parliamentary democracy, wherein there is a Council of Ministers headed by the PM. The need for secretarial services, especially to the cabinet, was felt.
- This procedure was legalised by the Indian Councils Act, 1861 during the time of Lord Canning, leading to the introduction of the portfolio system & the inception of the Executive Council of the Governor-General.
- The Secretariat of the Executive Council was headed by the Private Secretary to the Viceroy, but he did not attend the Council meetings.
- However, due to shortage of senior officials, the new cabinet secretariat that came into existence in 1947 was combined with the PM's Secretariat.
- Later on, the two were separated, as independent entities and a Cabinet Secretary was made in charge of the cabinet secretariat.
- Since 1948 units of different departments of the ministries were added to the cabinet secretariat.
- Organization & Method Division (O & M) of the Gol started functioning in March 1954 & continued to remain, as a separate wing of the cabinet secretariat till March 25 1964.
- In 1964, a new department called Department of Administrative Reforms was set up in the Ministry of Home Affairs and the O & M Division was transferred to this new department.
- Owing to the recommendations of the first ARC, a Central Personnel Agency (CPA) was created in the cabinet secretariat in August 1970.
- In February 1973, owing to the recommendation of CPA, the Department of Administrative Reforms was transferred to the cabinet secretariat.
- In 1977, during the Janata Government, the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms (that was already merged into one department) was again transferred to the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Since then, the Department is functioning in the Ministry

- In 1949 an Economic Committee of the Cabinet was set up with its Secretariat at Ministry of Finance.
- In 1957, the Defence Committee of the Cabinet was constituted under Cabinet Secretariat for which officers were drawn from the Defence services. This wing was transferred during 1991 to the Ministry of Defence.
- Department of Statistics was created in 1961 under Cabinet Secretariat which was transferred to Ministry of Planning in Feb. 1973

ORGANISATION

- The cabinet secretariat has three wings- civil wing, military wing, & intelligence wing. The civil wing provides advice & assistance to the Union cabinet.
- The military wing provides secretarial assistance to the Defence Committee of the cabinet the, Military Affairs Committee, the National Defence Council, and other committees dealing with defence matters.
- The intelligence wing deals with matters pertaining to the Joint Intelligence Committee of the Union cabinet
- Besides, the cabinet secretariat has the following organizations: 1) Research & Analysis Wing (RAW) 2) Director General of Security 3) Special Protection Group 4) Joint Intelligence Committee 5) Directorate of Public Grievances 6) National Authority, Chemical Weapons Convention
- Besides, there are a large number of other secretaries and officials like under secretary, deputy secretary to assist.
- In addition, the cabinet secretariat has subject related advisors to the PM.

FUNCTIONS

- The Cabinet Secretariat is responsible for the administration of the Government of India (Transaction of Business) Rules, 1961 and the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules 1961, facilitating smooth transaction of business in ministries/ departments of the government.
- The Cabinet Secretariat functions directly under the Prime Minister.
- The administrative head of the Secretariat is the Cabinet Secretary who is also the ex-officio Chairman of the Civil Services Board.
- Prepares agenda for meetings of the cabinet & provides necessary information and material for its deliberations.
- Keeps a record of the discussions & decisions of the cabinet and Cabinet Secretariat committees and circulates them to all concerned ministries.
- Provides secretarial assistance to the Cabinet Committees-Political Affairs Committee, Economic

Affairs Committee, Appointments Committee, and Committee on Parliamentary Affairs (Chairperson-Home Minister).

- Keeps the President, Vice-President, and all the central ministries informed of the activities undertaken by the central government.
- Prepares & finalizes the rules of business of the government and allots the same to ministries/departments of the Union government with the President's approval.
- Functions, as the chief coordinating agency in the central government. In this respect, it settles disputes between ministries.
- Watches the implementation of cabinet decisions by the concerned ministries/ departments and executive agencies.
- Handles the work pertaining to appointment & resignation of ministers, allotment of portfolios to the ministers, and organization and reorganization of ministries.

OFFICE OF CABINET SECRETARY

- The Cabinet Secretary is an administrative officer of the highest rank, selected for the office for his/her special qualities of tact, energy, initiative, and efficiency.
- Being the head of the cabinet secretariat, he/she is entrusted with the function of securing coordination, as well as, timely and effective action by all departments in matters in, which the cabinet, as a whole or the PM is interested.
- He should be a sufficiently senior officer so as to command the confidence & respect of all heads of departments.

APPOINTMENT & TENURE

- The Cabinet Secretary is the ex-officio chairperson of the Civil Services Board and heads the Indian Administrative Services.
- As a matter of convention, a senior most civil servant is appointed, as a Cabinet Secretary.
- He/She belongs to the Indian Administrative Services. The incumbent generally has tenure of 2 to 3 years.
- Though, there is no fixed tenure so far, the average tenure of the Cabinet Secretary in India has not been more than 3 years.
- His/Her tenure, however, can be extended. The Cabinet Secretary is directly responsible to the PM & reports to the PM concerning all matters.
- Below the Cabinet Secretary, there are three other secretaries in the cabinet secretariat. They head three wings respectively: security, coordination, & political.
- Below the secretaries, there are a number of additional secretaries, joint secretaries, directors, deputy secretaries, and under secretaries.
- Besides, there are two advisers attached exclusively to the PM in areas on science & technology.

ROLES, POWERS & FUNCTIONS OF CABINET SECRETARY

- Chief Coordinator of central administration.
- Chairperson of the senior selection board, which selects officials for the post of joint secretary in the central secretariat.
- Selects the officers for the post of secretary and additional secretary in the central secretariat.
- Chairperson of the committee of the Secretaries on administration, which is set up to resolve inter-ministerial disputes.
- Presides over the conference of chief secretaries, which is held annually.
- Chief advisor to the PM in all administration and policy matters.
- Gives sanction to a minister before the latter decides to lodge prosecution against the publisher or auditor of news paper in cases of defamation.
- In this respect, a Cabinet Secretary can act on his own discretion, without even resorting to the advice of the PM
- Advisor & conscience-keeper to all civil servants. He/She do help in resolution of departmental difficulties.
- As analyzed by Ramesh K.Arora & Rajni Goyal, "As a head of the civil services, the Cabinet Secretary ensures that morale of the civil servants remain high. He/She acts, as a buffer between the politicians & the civil servants and protects the interests of the latter in situations of conflict...."
- Acts, as a link between the PMO and various administrative agencies on one hand, and also between the civil services & the political system, on the other.
- A former Cabinet Secretary observes that the cabinet secretary is the eyes and ears of the PM to enable the latter to keep in touch with official conduct of business in the central government.
- But he/she is in no sense a watch dog or an invigilator on behalf of the PM.... A Cabinet Secretary performs a staff function... for his/her business is to help and not to oversee.
- The Gopalswamy Ayyangar Report on 'Reorganization of the Machinery of Government' (1949) made the following recommendations with regard to the status and role of a Cabinet Secretary
 - He/She should be an administrative officer of the highest rank, selected for the office for his special qualities of tact, energy, initiative, and efficiency.
 - He/She should entrusted, as a head of the cabinet secretariat, with function of securing coordination as well as timely and effective action by all departments of the government in the matters in, which the Cabinet as a whole or the Prime Minister is interested.
- He/She should be a sufficiently senior officer so, as to command the Cabinet Secretariat confidence & respect of all heads of departments.
- He/She should be ex-officio President of the Committee of Secretaries set up to advise the Prime

Minister & other Ministers on selections for administrative appointments.

- His/Her status in the service should be such, as to entitle him/her, to be regarded as the first member of the public services under the control of the central government; and one in whose judgement & impartiality the government as well as the services, could rely implicitly.

CABINET COMMITTEES

- The cabinet makes use of the committee system to facilitate decision-making in specific areas.
- The business rules provide for the constitution of standing committees of the cabinet so, as to ensure speedy decisions on matters of political & economic significance, as also to ensure coordination in administrative matters.
- These committees are appointed, as per the requirements of the situation and are occasionally ad hoc in nature.
- The numbers of committees do vary but normally there are three to eight members that constitute such committees.
- The PM or a cabinet minister can be the chairperson.
- There are some committees that function on a permanent basis.
- They are the Political Affairs Committee, Economic Affairs Committee, Committee on Parliamentary Affairs, Appointments Committee, Committee on Accommodation, Committee on Industry and Trade, and the Committee on Food and Agriculture and such others.
- Amongst these, the Political Affairs Committee is the most powerful one, as it has most of the senior ministers in it.

ROLES & FUNCTIONS

- The cabinet committees are to work on clearly defined fields that require in depth study & can relieve the cabinet of the burden of such work.
- The flexibility is ensured by these committees that enable ministers of different departments to come to a platform and sort out issues and work.
- The flexibility delves on particular issues to arrive at a consensus.
- Also, many matters, which could otherwise travel up to the cabinet for decisions, get settled at the level of these committees.
- This ensures not only a coordinated action on vital economic and political issues that confront the cabinet but also renders speedy decisions. The cabinet, more often, accepts the decisions of the cabinet committees.
- However, despite the fact that some cabinet committees have often exercised real authority, these committees have not been consistently

effective. They do not cover all important areas of governmental functioning. They can take up a matter only when it is referred to by the Minister concerned or by the Cabinet.

- They do not meet regularly, which is absolutely necessary, if sustained attention is to be given to complex problems and the progress in implementation of important policies and programmes is to be kept under constant review

EVALUATION

- During the Congress regime the cabinet secretariat substantially grew in stature and influence.
- It became a 'super-cabinet' & enjoyed real authority to get the top-level policies or decisions implemented by govt departments or agencies. Most of the officials enjoyed the status of a minister of state or secretary to the state of India.
- The rise of cabinet secretariat in India (including the PM's secretariat) in recent decades, especially from late eighties, is an indicator of the growing centralization of policy and decisional authority in the position of the PM.
- It has acted, as an overall supervisory agency over the line ministries in the name of exercising coordination.
- Nevertheless in this context, caution needs to be exercised to ensure that the staff agencies should not assume too much of powers to subdue the ministers and secretaries that could lead to the erosion of their powers and status.
- The cabinet secretariat, should keep itself to the role of secretarial assistance only.
- In Britain, The relationship between the prime minister and cabinet secretary, is how they decide to work together, makes a big difference to the cabinet secretary's influence.
- Here Cabinet Secretary acts as a Guardian of propriety and ethics The prime minister can, call on the cabinet secretary to advise on adherence to the Ministerial Code, which governs the actions of ministers.
- For example, in 2019 Sir Mark Sedwill investigated a leak from the National Security Council, leading prime minister Theresa May to demand the resignation of defence secretary Gavin Williamson.
- In Britain, Under the principle of ministerial accountability, it is government ministers who are accountable to parliament for the actions of the government, including the officials working for them.
- As such, the cabinet secretary is effectively held to account via the ministers they work for, primarily the prime minister who is also Minister for the Civil Service.