

# Functions and Functionaries of the Bangladesh Secretariat

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In pursuance of the popular inquisitiveness to know the activities inside the Bangladesh secretariat and their resulting impact on the intended beneficiaries, this study was undertaken to probe into the normal business of the functionaries therein at various hierarchical levels. A significant portion of the correspondences received by the secretariat is reported to be frivolous requiring no action at all. The action required cases remain either disposed or undisposed and of those which are disposed are being delayed as if delay has become the usual practice. It is, however, debatable whether delay is the cause or consequence of inefficiency. Moreover, efficiency criteria related to public administration is also not adequately objective. In the face of definitional and methodological limitations and problem of access to the data base, the study attempts to unveil the facts behind poor performance of the functionaries in the secretariat causing massive public annoyance and frustration.

## I. Introduction

Bangladesh is predominantly an administered polity. There is hardly any sphere of life where the public can avoid direct contact with the government and its functionaries. In this interface, people hold unique expectation about the role and performance of the government and deprivation from that expectation naturally creates annoyance and frustration. Public organisations being owned by the state and citizens, the people, therefore, believe that they deserve more attention and service from these organisations than from the private or non-governmental organisations. Peoples' expectations from the government now-a-days remain unfulfilled due to delay in the disposal of cases by the functionaries in the secretariat. Delay in the disposal of business at various levels of the Bangladesh government is publicly

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criticised in various national forums and press media. Many people ascribe the causes of delay to downright inefficiency and corruption. The intensity of popular criticism however, has not been followed by any significant attempt to diagnose and analyse the causes of delay in a systematic and objective manner.

The perceived delay not only affects the reliability of the secretariat as a mechanism for decision making but also sets in motion an adverse chain reaction in the entire governmental system leading to poor performance of public administration. The present study seeks to understand the causes of delay in the disposal of public business by concentrating on the Bangladesh secretariat as the unit of analysis. The Bangladesh secretariat is a part of the government system with higher and lower sub-systems with backward and forward linkages. Structurally, delay may emerge from any of the sub-systems having ramifications for other sub-systems. Some of these causes are internal while others are external over which the secretariat has little or no control. In the Bangladesh secretariat, the managerial sub-system is geared to the most efficient use of techniques. The *Rules of Business* and the *Secretariat Instructions* have detailed prescriptions relating to unit size, hierarchical set-up, time-frame for processing cases, method of processing and communicating cases, supervision and control of staff and many other rules and regulations related to administration. This is an area where efficiency of the secretariat as an organisation can be tested against the criteria statutorily fixed.

This study is limited to an empirical investigation of the activities of the functionaries at the managerial sub-system of the Bangladesh secretariat. Instead of examining the entire network of the secretariat, the study just probed into the issues like nature of correspondence, initiation time, state of case disposal, disposal time at different hierarchical levels and communication of decision to the concerned beneficiaries. By design, the study has confined itself to very narrow limits with a concentration on the very bases of an organisation. For convenience of analysis this paper is split into six sections besides introduction and conclusions. Section II provides data and methodology of the study. Section III presents a brief account of the structure and organisation of the Bangladesh secretariat. Section IV deals with the nature and type of correspondence. Section V attempts to provide a detailed analysis of performance of functionaries at

various hierarchical levels in the secretariat. Section VI endeavours to identify delay as a cause or consequence of inefficiency and finally section VII delineates bureaucratic response and responsibility to the delay in the disposal of cases which in turn determines the performance standard of the functionaries in the Bangladesh secretariat.

## II. Data and Methodology

To probe into the activities and performance of functionaries at the secretariat, some sections of a few ministries of the government of Bangladesh were surveyed during March 13-20, 1987. The study was based on multi-stage sampling design where at the first stage six ministries constituting about 13 percent of the total ministries were selected. The survey examined three categories of ministries namely, service, regulation and economic. Sample ministries belonging to service, regulation and economic categories turn out to be 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The ministries were classified into those three categories according to the nature of functions they assume and perform. According to that classification ministries belonging to service, regulation and economic categories represent about 50, 30 and 20 percent of the total ministries respectively. This is why the sample ministries at the first stage were selected at, service : regulation : economic = 3:2:1 proportion. Therefore, representation of selected ministries in their respective categories is proportional to their total numbers.

The survey examined six ministries, i.e., Local Government Division, Land, Health and Population Control, Relief and Rehabilitation, Education Division and Commerce. Those six ministries comprised of 89 sections of which 59 sections accounting for 66 percent were selected for the purpose of study at the second stage. Those 59 sections were distributed proportionately to each of the ministries concerned. Eight sections were taken from each of the same size ministries, e.g., Local Government Division, Land and, Relief and Rehabilitation comprising of 12 sections each. Nine sections were selected from 14 sections belonging to Education Division, ten sections out of 15 sections were taken from Health and Population control and 16 sections were selected from 24 sections covered by the ministry of Commerce. The sample sections were selected at random from

each ministry for intensive study. The scope of the survey was extended to cover all correspondences and cases, disposed or undisposed during the period January-December 1986. Officers working in the secretariat were employed to collect data because they have easy access to files and records preserved by the secretariat. With that end in view, 59 Assistant Secretaries/Sr. Assistant Secretaries were drawn temporarily from the secretariat to conduct the study.

The study enquired into some key variables like nature and type of correspondence, state and level of disposal of cases, time lag between receipt of correspondence and initiation of actions, time taken to dispose cases and communicate decisions to the concerned clienteles, reasons for delay in the disposal of cases and bureaucratic reaction to delay in the disposal of cases. Functions refer to activities as prescribed by the *Rules of Business*. Functionaries indicate persons belonging to *Cadre Service*. Correspondence means communication between clienteles and decision makers for a definite purpose like recruitment, training, leave, payment, purchase and sale, repair and maintenance, sanction of funds, release of grants, deputation, promotion etc. Case means a particular correspondence and disposal of cases means to end up with the cases within two weeks as the normal disposal time. Non-disposal of cases, on the contrary means failure to dispense with the cases by the period as mentioned above.

### III. Structure and Organisation of the Secretariat

The Bangladesh secretariat is the highest level sub-system of the government system with both upward and downward linkages. It underlies various government departments, autonomous, semi-autonomous and public statutory bodies and subordinate offices. On the top, the secretariat is linked with the council of ministers and ultimately with the President. According to the constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, the President is the head of both the state and the government.<sup>1</sup> The secretariat is divided into various ministries each of which consists of one or more divisions under the charge of a Minister. The business of government has

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1. Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs, *The Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh*, Dhaka. Government Printing Press, 1979, Article 56(1).



been distributed among these ministries under the provisions of the *Rules of Business*.<sup>2</sup> Below the level of a ministry and under its direct control and supervision there are a number of agencies for executing the policies of the government.

Attached departments are basically executive agencies providing direction to its subordinate offices for the implementation of government policies. They are mostly based at the capital for maintaining close liaison with their controlling ministry. The subordinate offices are spread all over the country at the divisional, district and upazila level. These offices are responsible for implementation of government policies at the field level. They work under the direction of the attached departments and in a very few cases of the ministry itself. In addition, there are a number of autonomous, semi-autonomous and public statutory bodies created under laws/rules for achieving specific objectives. These bodies may be of various types but normally they are either commercial, promotional or regulatory.

The Secretary is the administrative head of a ministry. He acts as the principal adviser to the Minister and is responsible for proper conduct of business allocated to his ministry under the *Rules of Business*. He also acts as the principal Accounting Officer of his ministry and has the ultimate responsibilities for all departmental expenditures. For clear delineation of duties intra-organisationally, a ministry is divided into a number of wings, branches and sections. An additional/Joint Secretary, unless in charge of a ministry/division, is placed as the head of a wing. In that capacity, he assumes responsibility for disposal of business of a clearly defined sphere of duty subject to the overall control of the Secretary. Several branches constitute a wing and each branch is headed by a Deputy Secretary. Similarly, a number of sections constitute a branch and each section is put under the charge of an Assistant Secretary. The section is the basic work unit of a ministry which is the gateway of all communications to and from the ministry. The section is manned by a Section Assistant, a Record Keeper, a Typist and a Peon.

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2. Cabinet Division, Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, *Rules of Business 1975* (Revised upto 1982), Dhaka, Bangladesh Government Press, 1984, Schedule 1.

An Additional/Joint Secretary, unless he is in charge of a ministry, shall assume full responsibility within his own sphere of duty and will submit all cases direct to the Minister for orders. Such cases will be returned to him through the Secretary. The Secretary, however, reserves the right to call for any such file prior to submission to the Minister or that he be consulted prior to such submission. A Deputy Secretary will dispose all cases in which no major question of policy is involved or which, under the rules or standing orders, he is competent to dispose. An Assistant Secretary will dispose all cases when there are clear precedents and no question of deviation from such precedents is involved or which under the rules or standing orders he is competent to dispose.

Within the broad legal framework of secretariat organisation, each ministry is organised according to the nature of the job to be performed and the pattern, extent and complexity of its vertical distribution. In the case of organisation by purpose, work is compartmentalised and is placed under one chain of command and business is allocated on the basis of its nature for greater specialisation and uniformity of standard. In the Bangladesh secretariat, sections are organised on either basis. In some ministries however, there is a mix of both the principles. Organisation by process may result in unequal distribution of work between sections whereas organisation by purpose creates need for heavy coordination. However, all of the above organisational patterns are necessary for proper functioning of normal secretariat activities.

#### **IV. Nature and Type of Correspondence**

During the period under study (1986), 93 percent of the correspondences received required action while the rest 7 percent were not worth taking action. Correspondences requiring no action are : copies of tour programs, telegrams, joining reports, transfer orders, press cutting, anonymous letters, representations, publications etc. The ministry of Health and Family Planning received the highest number of such frivolous correspondences (37 percent) followed by the ministry of Commerce (36 percent). The correspondences (action and no-action required) were received mainly from ten sources, i.e., government servants under ministry, other individuals, private institutions, NGOs, subordinate offices, statutory bodies,

departments, inter-ministerial, foreign mission and, international agencies and others. Of the action required correspondences the highest (19 percent) number of correspondences was received from interministerial source while the NGOs received the lowest (0.78 percent) number of those cases. The aforementioned correspondences made by departments, subordinate offices and other individuals turned out to be 16, 14 and 13 percent respectively.

The ministry of Land received the highest number of those correspondences (34 percent) from other individuals and the lowest (0.28 percent) from the NGOs. The correspondences received by the ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation from inter-ministerial and departments account for 22 and 17 percent respectively. The ministry of Education received the highest number of those correspondences (36 percent) from departments followed by inter-ministerial, e.g., 19 percent. Correspondences received by the ministry of Health and Family Planning from subordinate offices and inter-ministerial turn out to be 14 and 20 percent respectively. The ministry of Commerce received the highest number of correspondences (22 percent) from the inter-ministerial followed by private institutions (20 percent). It is interesting to note that the ministries as a whole received the highest number of correspondences (19 percent) from inter-ministerial and the lowest (0.78 percent) from the Non-Government Organisations (Table 1).

The subject-matter of the correspondences received from various sources was classified into nine categories, i.e., personnel management, financial management, general administration, project management, training, purchase and sale, repair and maintenance, ministerial business and policy. Of the total correspondences received by the ministry of Land, correspondences related to ministerial business were the highest (59 percent) followed by personnel management and financial management accounting for 14 percent each. The ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation received the highest number of correspondences (38 percent) on ministerial business and the lowest (0.29 percent) on repair and maintenance. Correspondences received by the ministry of Education accounts for 37 percent on personnel management followed by financial management (19 percent). In the case of the ministry of Local Government, correspondences on ministerial business were the

**Table 1 : Source of Correspondence by Ministry**

Source	Ministry						Total
	Land	Relief	Education	Local Govt.	Health	Commerce	
Government Servants	115	30	81	129	135	108	598
Under Ministry	(15.99)	(8.52)	(8.73)	(11.00)	(11.85)	(9.05)	(10.86)
Other Individuals	247	42	42	162	174	23	690
	(34.35)	(11.93)	(4.53)	(13.81)	(15.28)	(1.93)	(12.54)
Private Institutions	25	26	29	20	39	236	375
	(3.48)	(7.39)	(3.12)	(1.71)	(3.42)	(19.78)	(6.81)
NGOs	2	2	3	3	17	16	43
	(0.28)	(0.57)	(0.32)	(0.26)	(1.49)	(1.34)	(0.78)
Subordinate Offices	163	49	127	186	159	85	769
	(22.67)	(13.92)	(13.69)	(15.86)	(13.96)	(7.13)	(13.97)
Statutory Bodies	36	9	23	116	29	102	315
	(5.01)	(2.56)	(2.48)	(9.88)	(2.55)	(8.55)	(5.72)
Departments	7	60	335	129	150	214	895
	(0.97)	(17.04)	(36.10)	(11.00)	(13.17)	(17.98)	(16.26)
Inter-Ministerial	113	77	173	186	233	258	1040
	(15.72)	(21.88)	(18.64)	(15.85)	(20.46)	(21.63)	(18.90)
Foreign Missions & International Organisations	3	46	25	47	152	138	411
	(0.42)	(13.07)	(2.69)	(4.01)	(13.34)	(11.57)	(7.47)
Others	8	11	90	195	51	13	368
	(1.11)	(3.13)	(9.70)	(16.62)	(4.48)	(1.09)	(6.69)
Total	719	352	928	1173	1139	1193	5504
	(13.06)	(6.39)	(16.86)	(21.32)	(20.69)	(21.68)	(100.0)
	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage.

highest (30 percent) and those related to repair and maintenance were the lowest, e.g., 0.27 percent only.

Of the total correspondences received by the ministry of Health and Family Planning, correspondences received on personnel management and ministerial business turn out to be 25 percent and 18 percent respectively. The ministry of Commerce received the highest number of correspondences (26 percent) on ministerial business followed by purchase and sale accounting for 22 percent. It is observed that correspondences on ministerial business constitute the lion's share of all correspondences received by most of the ministries under study, while correspondences related to repair and maintenance turn out to be the lowest for all the ministries concerned. As a whole, correspondences related to ministerial business were the highest (27 percent) followed by personnel management accounting for 22 percent (Table 2).

### V. State and Level of Case Disposal

There are elaborate rules and procedures regarding disposal of cases requiring action. The time limit to dispose a case is 72 hours for Assistant Secretaries, 48 hours for Deputy Secretaries and 24 hours for other senior officers.<sup>3</sup> Data reveal that, of the total action required cases, the time lag between receipt of correspondence and initiation of action was the lowest, i.e., less than one week for the highest number of cases accounting for 63 percent. The cases requiring two weeks and four weeks or more to be initiated constituted 13 percent and 10 percent of the total action required cases respectively. The shares of those cases taking 1 week and 4 weeks to be initiated accounted for 4 percent each. The cases requiring initiation time of less than a week have been found to be the highest (21 percent) for the ministry of Health and Family Planning and the lowest (8 percent) for the ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation. The highest number of those cases requiring four weeks or more to be initiated belonged to the ministry of Education (23 percent) followed by the ministry of Land, i.e., 20 percent (Table 3). The ministry of Health and Family

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3. Organisation and Management Division, Cabinet Secretariat, Secretariat Instructions, Dhaka, Bangladesh Government Press, 1976, P. 40.



**Table 2 : Action Required Cases by Ministry and Subject**

Subject	Ministry						Total
	Land	Relief	Education	Local Govt.	Health	Commerce	
Personnel Management	98 (14.22)	52 (15.23)	334 (36.66)	212 (19.17)	269 (25.35)	153 (15.05)	1118 (21.81)
Financial Management	98 (14.22)	77 (22.58)	176 (19.30)	193 (17.45)	120 (11.31)	88 (8.65)	752 (14.68)
General Administration	36 (5.23)	50 (14.66)	147 (16.14)	138 (12.48)	49 (4.62)	62 (6.10)	482 (9.40)
Project Management	2 (0.29)	20 (5.87)	44 (4.83)	76 (6.87)	214 (20.17)	9 (0.88)	365 (7.12)
Training	19 (2.76)	5 (1.47)	144 (15.81)	99 (8.95)	122 (11.50)	63 (6.20)	452 (8.82)
Purchase & Sale	1 (0.15)	6 (1.76)	2 (0.22)	16 (1.45)	25 (2.36)	277 (22.32)	277 (5.40)
Repair & Maintenance	-	1 (0.29)	4 (0.44)	3 (0.27)	16 (1.51)	6 (0.59)	30 (0.59)
Ministerial Business	409 (59.36)	129 (37.83)	45 (4.94)	334 (30.20)	196 (18.47)	262 (25.76)	1375 (26.83)
Policy	-	-	-	7 (0.63)	6 (0.57)	113 (11.11)	126 (2.46)
Unspecified	26 (3.77)	1 (0.29)	15 (1.65)	28 (2.53)	44 (4.14)	34 (3.34)	148 (2.89)
Total	689 (13.44) (100.0)	341 (6.66) (100.0)	911 (17.78) (100.0)	1106 (21.58) (100.0)	1061 (20.70) (100.0)	1017 (19.84) (100.0)	5125 (100.0) (100.0)

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage.

**Table 3 : Time-lag Between Receipt of Correspondence and Initiation of Action of the Action Required Cases by Ministry.**

Ministry	(In Week)							Total
	< 1	1	2	3	4	4+	Not Initiated	
Land	378 (54.86)	27 (3.92)	93 (13.50)	52 (7.55)	33 (4.79)	106 (15.38)	—	689 (100.0)
Relief & Rehabilitation	274 (60.35)	6 (1.76)	33 (9.68)	14 (4.11)	5 (1.46)	9 (2.64)	—	341 (100.0)
Education	546 (59.93)	33 (3.62)	102 (11.20)	54 (5.93)	33 (3.62)	135 (14.82)	8 (0.88)	911 (100.0)
Local Government	681 (61.67)	47 (4.25)	159 (14.28)	61 (5.52)	47 (4.25)	104 (9.40)	7 (0.68)	1106 (100.0)
Health & Family Planning	687 (64.75)	35 (3.30)	142 (13.38)	70 (6.60)	35 (3.30)	85 (8.01)	7 (0.68)	1061 (100.0)
Commerce	685 (67.35)	32 (3.15)	126 (12.38)	62 (6.10)	27 (2.66)	79 (7.77)	6 (0.59)	1017 (100.0)
Total	3251 (63.43)	180 (3.51)	655 (12.78)	313 (6.11)	180 (3.51)	518 (10.11)	28 (0.55)	5125 (100.0)

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage.

Planning thus appears to be the most and the Education division the least responsive to initiate cases requiring action.

Of the total action required cases those disposed within one week, the ministry of Health and Family Planning has been found to have disposed the highest (23 percent) number of cases while the ministry of Land the lowest, i.e., only 10 percent. The Local Government Division dealt with the highest (23 percent) number of those cases disposed but delayed followed by the ministry of Health and Family Planning accounting for 22 percent. The ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation disposed the smallest number of those cases, i.e., 7 percent only. Of the total action required cases 54 percent were disposed but delayed, 24 percent were disposed within one week and the rest were undisposed. The ministry of Health and Family Planning disposed the highest (23 percent) and the ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation the lowest (10 percent) number of those cases requiring less than a week to dispose (Table 4). The ministry of Health and Family Planning thus appears to be prompt in disposing cases compared to other ministries under study.

Mention should be made here that the cases disposed within a week are considered to be timely disposed, and those requiring more than a week to dispose are treated as delayed cases. Of the cases disposed by more than a week but less than 15 days, the share of the ministry of Health and Family Planning was the highest (23 percent) while that of the ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation the lowest (11 percent). The cases which were disposed within 22-30, 31-45 and, 90 days and above, the proportion of cases belonging to the Local Government Division appeared to be relatively high as compared to other ministries. Of the total delayed cases, 25 percent were disposed by more than a week but less than 15 days and those requiring 91 days or more to be disposed accounted for 15 percent. The cases requiring 15-21, 22-30, 31-45, 46-90 days to be disposed turned out to be 16, 14, 13 and 15 percent respectively (Table 5).

Time taken to dispose cases varied across ministries and also between same levels in different ministries. On an average, an Assistant Secretary took 8 days to dispose a case while a Deputy Secretary and an Additional Secretary required just a day to do the same. Joint Secretaries required 2 days on the average to dispose a case. Data reveal that the Assistant Secretaries and Secretaries in the ministry of Land required the longest time to

**Table 4 : Disposal Rate of Action Required Cases by Ministry**

(In Month)

Ministry	Undisposed	Duration of Disposal						Total
		0	< 1	1-2	3-4	5-6	6+	
Land	246 (21.93)	15 (5.70)	266 (10.31)	73 (11.91)	57 (16.33)	18 (16.36)	14 (16.09)	689 (13.44)
Relief & Rehabilitation	19 (1.69)	12 (4.56)	257 (9.96)	33 (5.38)	12 (3.44)	5 (4.55)	3 (3.45)	341 (6.65)
Education	179 (15.95)	20 (7.60)	477 (18.47)	125 (20.39)	64 (18.34)	26 (23.64)	20 (22.99)	911 (17.78)
Local Government	250 (22.28)	86 (32.70)	509 (19.72)	143 (23.33)	80 (22.92)	24 (21.82)	14 (16.09)	1106 (21.58)
Health & Family Planning	171 (15.24)	71 (27.00)	589 (22.82)	126 (20.56)	71 (20.34)	18 (16.36)	15 (17.24)	1061 (20.70)
Commerce	257 (22.91)	59 (22.44)	483 (18.72)	113 (18.43)	65 (18.63)	19 (17.27)	21 (24.14)	1017 (19.85)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1122 (100.0)</b>	<b>263 (100.0)</b>	<b>2581 (100.0)</b>	<b>613 (100.0)</b>	<b>349 (100.0)</b>	<b>110 (100.0)</b>	<b>87 (100.0)</b>	<b>5125 (100.0)</b>

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage.

**Table 5 : Disposal Time of Delayed Cases by Ministry**

(In Days)

Ministry	Duration of Disposal						Total
	< 15	15-21	22-30	31-45	46-90	91+	
Land	76 (10.92)	46 (10.29)	39 (10.26)	39 (10.68)	68 (15.18)	57 (13.42)	325 (11.77)
Relief & Rehabilitation	74 (10.63)	37 (8.28)	23 (6.05)	17 (4.66)	22 (4.91)	16 (3.76)	189 (6.85)
Education	135 (19.40)	75 (16.78)	76 (20.00)	68 (18.63)	91 (20.31)	68 (16.00)	513 (18.58)
Local Government	126 (18.10)	103 (23.04)	98 (25.79)	98 (26.85)	90 (20.09)	112 (26.35)	627 (27.71)
Health & Family Planning	161 (23.13)	111 (24.83)	79 (20.79)	81 (22.19)	91 (20.31)	85 (20.00)	608 (22.02)
Commerce	124 (17.82)	75 (16.78)	65 (17.11)	62 (16.99)	86 (19.20)	87 (20.47)	499 (18.07)
Total	696 (25.21) (100.0)	447 (16.19) (100.0)	380 (13.76) (100.0)	365 (13.22) (100.0)	448 (16.23) (100.0)	425 (15.39) (100.0)	2761 (100.0) (100.0)

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage.



dispose cases compared to other ministries. Cases were found to be disposed most quickly at Additional Secretaries' level across the ministries, and it was observed that in most cases they took just one day to dispose a case individually. Quickest disposal of cases by them is mainly due to relatively low work load compared to other officials in the secretariat. Regarding speed in the disposal of cases, Additional Secretaries are followed by Deputy Secretaries each of which required a maximum of 2 days to dispose a case (Table 6).

**Table 6 : Average Duration for Disposal of Cases by Level and Ministry.**

(Number of Days)

Ministry	Level				
	Asst. Secy.	Dy. Secy.	Jt. Secy.	Addl. Secy.	Secretary
Land	11	2	7	-	9
Relief & Rehabilitation	4	1	2	0	2
Education	7	1	2	1	4
Local Govt.	8	2	1	-	2
Health & F.P.	10	2	2	-	1
Commerce	7	1	1	1	2
All Ministries	8	1	2	1	2

Data reveal that Joint Secretaries disposed 36 percent and Secretaries 24 percent of the total action required cases. The share of disposal of cases by Assistant Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries and Additional Secretaries constituted 12 percent, 25 percent and 3 percent of the total disposed cases respectively. Cases related to almost all subjects as mentioned earlier are mostly disposed at Joint Secretaries level followed by Deputy Secretaries. The highest (35 percent) number of cases related to personnel management was disposed at Joint Secretary level followed by Secretary level (26 percent). Of the cases belonging to financial management, the highest (36 percent) number of cases was disposed at Joint Secretary level and the cases disposed at Additional Secretary level were the lowest (2 percent). The highest number of cases related to general administration was disposed at Deputy Secretary level (29 percent) followed by Joint Secretary level (27 percent). Ministerial cases disposed at Joint Secretary level were the highest (40 percent) while those at Additional Secretary level were the lowest, i. e., 3 percent only (Table 7).

Table 7 : Disposal of Action Required Cases by Level and Subject

Subject	Level					Total
	Assistant Secretary	Deputy Secretary	Joint Secretary	Additional Secretary	Secretary	
Personnel Management	158 (14.13)	266 (23.79)	390 (34.88)	18 (1.62)	286 (25.58)	1118 (100.0)
Financial Management	77 (10.24)	250 (33.24)	271 (36.04)	15 (2.00)	139 (18.48)	752 (100.0)
General Administration	84 (17.43)	140 (29.04)	130 (26.97)	10 (2.08)	118 (24.48)	482 (100.0)
Project Management	52 (14.25)	79 (21.64)	142 (38.90)	4 (1.10)	88 (24.11)	365 (100.0)
Training	34 (7.52)	98 (21.68)	146 (32.30)	10 (2.22)	164 (36.28)	452 (100.0)
Purchase/ Sale	37 (13.36)	72 (25.99)	115 (41.52)	5 (1.80)	48 (17.33)	277 (100.0)
Repair. Maintenance	3 (10.0)	9 (30.0)	15 (50.0)	-	3 (10.0)	30 (100.0)
Ministerial	139 (10.11)	349 (25.38)	556 (40.44)	38 (2.76)	293 (21.31)	1375 (100.0)
Policy	-	6 (4.76)	50 (39.68)	18 (14.28)	52 (41.28)	126 (100.0)
Unspecified	10 (6.76)	25 (16.89)	32 (21.62)	40 (27.03)	41 (27.70)	148 (100.0)
Total	594 (11.59)	1294 (25.25)	1847 (36.04)	158 (3.08)	1232 (24.04)	5125 (100.0)

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage.

## VI. Delay as a Cause or Consequence of Inefficiency

Delay in the disposal of cases at various levels of the secretariat is criticised from all corners of the society. It is believed that delay is the outcome of inefficiency. Delay is primarily a phenomenon connected with administrative process and the best way to look for it would be organisations themselves. Secondly, organisations are conscious contrivances for the achievement of goals. For that purpose all organisations are intendedly rational, thereby ensuring precision, speed, impartiality and predictability.<sup>4</sup> Delay may be both a cause and a consequence of bureaucratic dysfunctions defined as the unintended consequences of methods of organisations which are in themselves rational. Emphasis on strict adherence to rules induces the individual official to use them as ends in themselves rather than means. The formalism of the bureaucratic rather than its goals. Under this system functionaries are trained to attain operational efficiency rather than achieving goals. At this they become methodical but not efficient and effective in the correct sense of the term.

Bureaucratic dysfunctions can be broadly divided into three distinct categories, i.e., those created by external demands, the ones that are internally generated and a few others treated as dilemmas. Externally induced dysfunctions occur during the interface between an organisation and its task environment. Dysfunctions as dilemmas refer to situations involving trade-offs, i.e., more of one can not be achieved without having less of the other. Dilemmas arising out of organisation are inherent in the needs of communication and coordination, bureaucratic discipline and professional expertise, managerial planning and initiative.<sup>5</sup> Internally generated dysfunctions are those which emanate more or less from the malfunctioning of formally articulated and differentiated structure of the organisation. These dysfunctions causing delay in the disposal of cases are manifested in terms of jurisdictional infringements, passing the

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4. See Max Weber, *From Max Weber : Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, New York : Oxford University press, 1946, pp. 196-244.

5. Peter M. Blau and W. Richard Scott, *Formal Organisations : A Comparative Approach*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964, PP. 242-253.

buck, distortion of priorities, employees' disorientations and misallocation of resources.

Delay in the disposal of cases is due to structural and behavioral reasons. The most obvious reason for delay in the secretariat is the heavy work load the ministries assume for themselves. Although the work load is rationally distributed among various hierarchical levels in the secretariat, unfortunately, those allocations of business have been swept aside by a practice called jurisdictional infringements. Data reveal that the ministries have infringed into the jurisdictions of the agencies under their control ignoring the clear division of work statutorily prescribed. The ministries are found to assume responsibilities which they are not supposed to undertake and as a result they become unable to discharge their own responsibilities in due course. It is observed that 22 percent of the total action required cases belonged to personnel management which is next to ministerial business (27 percent). The bulk of the personnel management cases can better be apprehended if we check the share of those cases against the total number of cases received by individual ministries under study.

Under the Education Division, total authorised cadre strength is 8715 of which 7791 belong to BCS (General Education) and 924 to BCS (Technical Education). Under the ministry of Health and Family Planning, the authorised cadre strength for the BCS (Health) is 7175 while that for the BCS (Family Planning) is 322 adding to a total of 7497 officers. Of the total cases on personnel management across the ministries, the Education Division dealt with the highest (30 percent) number of cases followed by the ministry of Health and Family Planning (24 percent). Such evidence infallibly proves the usurption of personnel management functions by the ministries that are clearly allocated to the departments under the *Rules of Business*.

The Section Officers scheme was introduced in 1961 with the expectation that 50 percent of the cases will be disposed at their level. Data reveal that the Assistant Secretaries performed much below the rate of performance of Joint Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries. The Joint Secretary's level came out as the most effective level in the disposal of cases, followed by the levels of Deputy Secretary and Secretary. The tendency to push up cases is due to lack of experience and knowledge about the activities of the

secretariat and the consequent lack of confidence to take decisions at their level. This situation is further aggravated by a lack of trust in their ability by the superiors and the tendency towards centralisation. Proportionately heavier work load for Assistant Secretaries compared to other strata is another reason for slower disposal of cases by them.

Speed in the disposal of cases in the secretariat is basically based on two assumptions. The first assumption envisages an uninterrupted flow of duly processed inputs from other parts of the governmental system. The agencies under the control of the ministry are expected to supply inputs which are complete and consistent with the requirements of existing laws, rules and regulations. The other assumption relates to the availability of all necessary logistics for proper functioning of the secretariat business. But, data reveal that the two assumptions are only partially met. Cases received from other units of the governmental system were mostly incomplete, vague, inaccurate and sometimes contradictory with each other. Of the total undisposed cases the highest (44 percent) number of cases could not be disposed due to incomplete processing. On the contrary, usurpation of extra functions without corresponding increase in staff hindered normal functioning of the secretariat business. Staff and logistics problems are endemic in the secretariat and were cited as principal reasons for delay in the disposal of cases.

The *Secretariat Instructions* have prescribed a maximum of three levels for final disposal of a case. These instructions have also clearly spelled out the type of cases that are to be submitted to the Secretary for disposal. Data, however, reveal that the Secretaries disposed about 20 percent of the cases against 2 percent by Additional Secretaries. This means that the Additional Secretaries had not either assumed nor were given full responsibility for disposing cases independently. They just merely added another level to the existing hierarchy. This in effect indicates that for the 20 percent decisions given at the Secretary's level, most of the files had to move four hierarchical levels. This is contrary to all prescribed procedures for the secretariat and is bound to cause delay. If no significant disposal is made at the Additional Secretary's level, there is no justification to retain this symbolic position.



## VII. Bureaucratic Response and Responsibility

Ministries were created on the basis of a policy execution dichotomy between their work and those of the agencies under their control. In other words, the major function of a ministry is policy making. Unfortunately, the ministries now assume so much executive responsibilities that they have little time to deal with their own business. It is found that, of the total cases only 4 percent cases are related to policy. The highest (90 percent) number of policy related cases belonged to the ministry of Commerce alone while the remaining cases were shared by the ministry of Local Government, and Health and Family Planning. Surprisingly, the ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, Education and Land had no policy related cases to deal with. Moreover, 64 percent of those policy cases remained undisposed by the end of the year under study. The proportion (39 percent) of undisposed policy cases is much higher than that of the aggregate undisposed cases (22 percent). As policy cases demand more attention, vigour and analysis in their resolution, so, the ministries find it expedient to postpone taking action on them.

The hallmark of a bureaucratic system is its objectivity and impersonality. In the Bangladesh secretariat also, there is a need for fixing priorities and it ought to have been done on an impersonal basis. However, in addition to distortion of priorities that have already taken place, there is also differential treatment of the cases dealt in the ministries on many non-bureaucratic criteria. Operation of one such norm that is clearly evident from the survey data is the discrimination in favour of the correspondences made by the government servants themselves. As a group, the government servants had the highest share (84 percent) of disposed and the lowest share (16 percent) of undisposed cases among the nine groups under study. Compared to this, the other individuals had the lowest rate of disposed (67 percent) and the highest (33 percent) share of undisposed cases.

Private institutions had also similar fate like the private individuals with 68 percent disposed and 32 percent undisposed cases. In terms of speed of disposal also, the government servants got 65 percent of their cases cleared in less than a month's time as against 48 and 50 percent cases cleared respectively for private individuals and private institutions. The reason for comparatively more cases of government servants being disposed at a greater

speed is their easy accessibility to the decision making authorities. This group can also exert pressure through their intimate relationship with others in the service and their knowledge of rules and procedures as well as the many informal ways of expediting the processing of their cases. Because the sections are already overloaded with work, the officers concerned find it expedient to deal with those matters first for which pressures are exerted. It is not always the merit of a case but the amount of pressure and the person making it that determine the priority of dealing with cases.

This situation is sufficient to explain the low attention paid to the cases of private individuals and institutions. They lack access to the secretariat and consequently fail to draw the attention of concerned authorities to their cases. This phenomenon, however, is not universally true to the extent that those among them who have the power and access, easily get their cases cleared through the bureaucratic process. Thus 48 percent cases of the individuals and 51 percent cases of the private institutions were indeed disposed in one month's time though these two categories also had the highest and the second highest percentage of undisposed cases at the end of the year under study. This only highlights the point that individual's power and status rather than group character have much more influence in obtaining services from the secretariat.

The negligence towards ministerial business is occasioned by exertion of pressure and persuasion to attend to matters of peripheral interest to a ministry. It is just not physically possible to handle the present work load attributed to the functionaries in the secretariat. Ministries, therefore, attend to only that much of ministerial business which they could not avoid or could avoid only at the cost of severe retribution from higher authorities or very adverse public criticism. The aforementioned cases get attention from the very beginning of processing cases for disposal. The most pressing cases were initiated rather promptly, for example, 63 percent of ministerial business was initiated by less than a week. Besides the cases under pressure, all other cases are found to be disposed between 2-4 weeks of time. Ministerial business had the largest proportion of cases initiated in 2, 3 and 4 weeks time after receipt of correspondences.

The secretariat could have done better in dealing with its own

business if other peripheral business would not come through the backdoor. The Assistant Secretaries and Secretaries had to share their time in disposing ministerial business with personnel management cases. Of the cases disposed by Assistant Secretaries and Secretaries, the cases belonging to personnel management turned out to be 26 and 25 percent respectively. The corresponding shares for ministerial business were 19 and 22 percent respectively. As mentioned earlier, the Assistant Secretaries must complete processing of a case at their level within 72 hours from the time of receipt of a correspondence. Survey data reveal that the Assistant Secretaries took on an average 8 days to dispose a case. Among other things, overload is creating an undesirable congestion of work. Hardpressed by time and due to continuous overflow of cases on their desks, they can neither devote time nor pay attention to the cases requiring scrutiny and examination.

Because of the haphazard and casual manner in which the cases are processed, the Assistant Secretaries do not feel confident to dispose cases themselves. Moreover, in our administrative culture, rewards given for quality work are unknown whereas the retribution and penalty for even a minor or unintended fault are very severe. There is thus the tendency to push up files even on cases where the Assistant Secretaries have the power and the competence to dispose them. It is therefore, not surprising to find that the Assistant Secretaries as a class disposed only 10 percent of the total disposed cases as against a stipulated target of 50 percent cases. This behavioral response is very much evident at other levels also, forcing the Secretaries to dispose 20 percent of the total disposed cases. This rate of disposal is many times higher than what is envisaged under the rules.

### **VIII. Conclusions**

The study is basically diagnostic in nature with the principal aim of finding the state of disposal of cases in the Bangladesh secretariat, the causes of delay in so far as they relate to the secretariat structure and to suggest remedial measures to expedite normal functioning in the secretariat. It is observed that the ministries under study are shouldering extra load in dealing with cases related to personnel management. We are aware of the

perverse sense of an exercise of power in dealing with matters on personnel management in a society which still remains traditional in its outlook and societal relationships. The extra burden borne by the functionaries in the secretariat could be substantially reduced through delegating the personnel management functions to the departments and public statutory bodies. There is, of course, a need to ensure uniformity of standard in the dispensation of personnel cases. This can be ensured by deputing officers with suitable background and aptitude from the pool of the ministry of Establishment to man the principal positions in the personnel divisions of the departments. This is already in practice in the public statutory bodies and may be tried in departments also.

The time-lag between receipt of correspondence and initiation of action has been found to be 1-4 weeks and above for about 36 percent of the action required cases. The delay starts right from the receipt of correspondence to the communication of decisions to the incumbents. About 20 percent of the action required cases have been found to be disposed between 1-6 months and above. Viewed from hierarchical level, an Assistant Secretary took 8 days while a Deputy Secretary and an Additional Secretary required just a day to dispose a case. In accordance with *Secretariat Instructions* the time limit to dispose a case is 72 hours for Assistant Secretaries, 48 hours for Deputy Secretaries and 24 hours for other senior officers. The functionaries in the secretariat could not perform their jobs within the time limit as prescribed in the *Secretariat Instructions*. Mutual interactions among functionaries and monitoring their business by the Secretary at a regular interval might improve the performance at all levels. There should be an inter-ministerial committee to check adherence of the functionaries to the *Secretariat Instructions* and *Rules of Business* and take appropriate actions wherever it deems necessary.

The Additional Secretaries are found to deal with the fewest cases which could be furnished at Joint Secretaries' level. In view of the redundancy of Additional Secretaries, the abolition of their posts could be considered. Furthermore, the allocation of resources like type machines, photocopy machines and messengers are also not fair at various levels in the secretariat for which communication of decisions are delayed sometimes. Usually officers at higher levels are provided with relatively good

logistics compared to officers at lower levels. So, it is necessary that the officer under whose signature a communication is to be issued should get the fair copy typed and communicated by his staff. In order to expedite disposal of cases, the functionaries at the secretariat should get rid of unnecessary procedures thereby facilitating implementation of policies instead of achieving operational efficiency. The popular belief that functionaries of the secretariat are beneficiaries themselves could be disproved through performing ministerial business aimed at peoples' welfare for which they are employed.



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