

# Secretariat Structure Before and After Independence of Bangladesh

M. Safiur Rahman\*

*Abstract Both Pakistan period and Independent Bangladesh have the legacy of British administration. But historically, secretariat in U.K. developed as a 'brain-trust' of the cabinet; while in our country it had its origin in the Revenue administration of the East India Company. Both erstwhile Pakistan and Bangladesh saw the upheavals of Parliamentary and Presidential system of Governments including Military rule, but the secretariat structure found little or no change. In course of time it could establish its utility and supremacy. Rules of Business of the government has delimited secretariat functions as planning, policy formulation, evaluation of the execution of the policy, assisting the Minister in discharging his parliamentary and other responsibilities, top level management etc, but secretariat is sometimes found to be bogged down with routine and trifling matters. Secretariat officials in erstwhile Pakistan seemingly could wield more effective powers than those in Bangladesh. **Size** of the secretariat changed many a time. But its real effectiveness depends not on its size, rather on its capacity and expertise to give fact-based and realistic policy to the political government.*

## Introduction

Bangladesh have a legacy of British and Pakistani Administrative Structure. In the British system there is a known dichotomy of policy formulation and execution. In the sphere of policy formulation, the ministers are to be assisted by a group of experts having liberal education, intelligence and neutral mind. Hence, there was the need for a Secretariat.

---

\*Former Member, Directing Staff. Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC). Savar. Dhaka.

There is a sharp distinction between the secretariat structure under the British system and the top administrative offices in the American system. In the British system, parliamentary government as it is, the Cabinet is responsible to Parliament jointly. On the other hand, in the United States of America the term 'Presidential Cabinet' is rather extra-legal. The Constitution of the United States did not envisage any such Cabinet. The Constitution says that the President may require the opinions of the Principal officers of the Executive Departments. The Ministers there are practically the top-most officers of the departments appointed by the President. By conventions and customs, however, the President feels like taking the opinion of the heads of the departments in a group and therefore informally the Presidential Cabinet emerged. On the other hand, the famous Machinery of the Government Committee in U.K. in 1914 enumerated the three-fold functions of the cabinet as follows :<sup>2</sup>

- a) Final determination of the policy to be laid before the Parliament.
- b) Supreme Control of the National Executive in accordance with the laws passed by the Parliament.
- c) Continuous co-ordination and delimitation of the various governmental departments.

The function of a cabinet in a parliamentary government of the British type still remains so. These are policy formulation of top national priorities, giving the final shape of a Bill before placing it to the parliament and co-ordination and conflict resolution amongst the various departments of the government. In order to perform these functions efficiently and effectively, the cabinet requires several intelligent, highly educated and neutral team of experts with balanced mind and flexible personality who could be responsive to the changing leadership and odd circumstances.

---

*Generally known as Haldane Committee after the name of its Chairman,*

Hence a Cabinet secretariat grew as a repository of knowledge and experience and the positions like (Permanent) Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Under-secretary, Assistant Secretary, Principal, Assistant Principal forming an Administrative class mainly concerned with policy formulation came into being and their offices put together came to be known as the Secretariat.

### **British India**

The East India Company did not initially use the term 'Secretariat' in this country. The company rulers needed giving guidance to the European Supervisors (later, Collectors) who were engaged in supervising collection of revenue. They needed some writers and clerks who could transmit their direction to the field. These writers and clerks were English educated people with knowledge and experience about the country and could be trusted to keep things secret. This quality of keeping the secret was helpful to rename the top writers as Secretaries and the chief writer as the Chief Secretary. The 'Writers' building" in Calcutta (now Kolkata) which is now the main Secretariat building of the government of West Bengal bears a testimony for the same.

With the end of East India Company's rule and the taking over of Indian Administration by the British Government, the secretariat concept of the British Government took firm footing in the Indian sub-continent<sup>3</sup>

In 1919, the central government of British India had 9 Departments and even in 1939 the number of re-organized Departments continued to be 9 in number. Under the Act of the 1919 there was a sharp distinction between the reserved subjects and transferred subjects in the provinces. The transferred subjects were administered by Minister and the reserved subjects were under the control of the Governor-in-council. For example,

---

<sup>3</sup> Muzaffar Ahmed Choudhuri. *The Civil Service of Pakistan (Dhaka : NIPA). 1969, pp. 3-4.*

Agriculture was a transferred subject while Irrigation was a reserved subject.

### **Early Pakistan Period**

Immediately after partition of India in 1947 and the emergence of a new dominion viz. Paltistan, the need for a new Secretariat was paramount so long Delhi was the capital of British India and Calcutta was the capital of undivided Bengal. But as Karachi and Dhaka were declared to be the capitals of Pakistan and the province of East Bengal respectively, the secretariat at Delhi and Calcutta had to be bifurcated and in most cases new offices had to be set-up. Several secretariat officers who opted for Pakistan came to the new capitals. Furthermore, as Sylhet, previously belonging to Assam joined East Bengal by a referendum, a number of officials who were working at Shilong, the then capital of Assam travelled to Dhaka to join their new secretariat colleagues at the Eden Buildings.

There was an initial mess and anomalies of the things. Confusion and mess were predominant in the Central Secretariat as Karachi had only the experience of running a provincial govt. having been so long the capital of the province of Sindh. Dhaka had, however, some earlier experience of running a provincial government during the earlier short period of partition of Bengal. But the new national spirit and enthusiasm for creative work overshadowed the physical and material difficulties. In fact, it is said, that some offices at Karachi had to be started under the open sky in the shade of trees or other buildings.

It was not until 1956 that the Constitution of Pakistan was framed. The Constitution characterized the state as an Islamic Republic and broadly envisaged a parliamentary form of government, Article 37(7) provided that 'in the exercise of his functions, the President shall act in accordance with the advice of the Cabinet or the appropriate Minister or Minister of State as the

case may be, except in cases where he was empowered by the Constitution to act in his discretion'. The executive authority the Republic was, however, to be exercised in the following manner as provided in Art. 41:

- (1) All executive action of the Federal government shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the President.
- (2) The President shall by rules specify the manner in which orders and other instruments made and executed in his name shall be authenticated and the validity of any order or instrument so authenticated shall not be questioned in any court on the ground that it was not made or executed by the President.
- (3) The President shall also make rules for the allocation and transaction of the business of the federal government.

Similarly, the Article. 73 of the Constitutions vested in the Governor the executive authority of the province which should be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him. Moreover Article 74 provided as follows :

- (1) All executive actions of the govt. of a province shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the Governor thereof.
- (2) The Governor shall by rules specify the manner in which orders and other instruments made and executed in his name shall be authenticated and the validity of any order or instrument so authenticated shall not be questioned in any court on the ground that it was not made or executed by the Governor.
- (3) The Governor shall also make rules for the allocation and transaction of the business of the provincial government.

Like the President, the Governor under Article 71(7) was to act in accordance with the advice of the cabinet or the appropriate

Minister as the case may be, except where he was given discretionary power.

The Constitution did not speak a single word about the Secretariat or the functionaries of the Secretariat. Yet the Secretariat as the office of the Cabinet continued to exist as the legacy of the British parliamentary democracy. But as under Article 37(5) in case of the Federal government and under Article 71(5) in case of the provincial government the Cabinet was made collectively responsible to the National Assembly or the Provincial Assembly as the case may be, the government was regarded to be a single whole. Hence the Secretariat which was to assist the Cabinet in policy formulation, was also a single secretariat. Thus an Assistant Secretary or an Under Secretary was actually the Assistant Secretary or Under Secretary to the government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and dividing the Secretariat into Ministries and Divisions and their attachment to those Ministries or Divisions was just secondary in nature.

### **Constitution of 1962**

The Ayub Constitution of 1962 changed the nature of the government and made it Presidential on the one hand and largely unitary on the other. Article 31 of the 1962 Constitution reads:

The executive authority of the Republic is vested in the President and shall be exercised by him either directly or through officer subordinate to him, in accordance with this constitution and the law.

Similarly, in case of Provincial Government, Article 80 reads-

The executive authority of a province is vested in the Governor of the province and shall be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him, in accordance with this constitution, the law and the direction of the President.

This 'direction of the President' made the nature of the state unitary although in form the Constitution appeared to be federal having only a central list in the third schedule and leaving all other residuary powers to the provincial government.

In place of earlier Cabinet, the President would have a Council of Ministers to assist him in the performance of his function as provided in Article 33 and the Governor would have the same 'with the concurrence of the President'. Under Article 32 the President was authorized to specify the manner in which orders and other instruments made and executed in pursuance of any authority or power vested in the President and also to regulate the allocation and transaction of the business of the central government and to 'establish divisions of that government'. Similarly, under Article 81 the Governor of a province was authorized to specify the manner in which orders and other instruments made and executed in pursuance of any authority or power vested in the Governor as well as to regulate the allocation and transaction of the business of Government of the Province and 'establish departments of that Government'. Thus it is seen that unlike 1956 Constitution, the Constitution of 1962 specifically mentioned about the Divisions of the Government in the Centre and the Departments of the Government in the provinces.

There was a further difficulty. Under Article 35 it was provided that the President might, from amongst the members of the National Assembly, appoint persons to be Parliamentary Secretaries and persons so appointed shall perform such functions in relation to these Divisions as the President may direct but the number of Parliamentary Secretaries would not exceed the number of Divisions of the Central Government established by the President.

Similarly, under Article 84 it was provided that the Governor of the province might, from amongst the members of the Assembly of the province, appoint persons to be Parliamentary

Secretaries and persons so appointed shall perform such functions in relation to those departments as the Governor might direct. But the number of Parliamentary Secretaries should not exceed the number of departments of the government of the province established by the Governor.

These Parliamentary Secretaries stood at a odd relationship with the Ministers on the one hand and the permanent Secretaries of the government on the other. The Ministers were originally not to be the members of the elected Assembly. The President, however, under 'Removal of difficulty' clause tried to keep the seats of some top nominees from the National Assembly and Provincial Assembly but it did not find ground to be constitutional. On the other hand, the Parliamentary Secretaries were the elected representative of the Assembly without executive power; hence the Parliamentary secretaries that were taken as a hyphen between the Ministers and legislatures had to be non-operational in the long run.

However, Schedule-1 of the Rules of Business 1962 framed under 1962 Constitution listed the following Divisions:

1. Cabinet
2. Commerce
3. Communications.
4. Defence
5. Economic Affairs
6. Education
7. Establishment
7. Family Planning
8. Finance
9. Food and Agriculture
10. Foreign Affairs
11. Health
12. Home Affairs
13. Industries
14. Information and Broadcasting
15. Kashmir Affairs



16. Labour and Social Welfare
17. Law
18. Natural Resources
19. Parliamentary Affairs
20. Planning
21. Rehabilitation and Works
22. Scientific and Technological Research
23. States and Frontier Regions.

Actually the above Divisions were grouped into Ministries and some of the divisions were kept under the President's Secretariat itself.

Rut there was a serious difficulty in respect of Parliamentary secretary *vis-a-vis* department in case of provincial government particularly in case of the government of East Pakistan. The government of East Pakistan had at that time 16 departments. In late 1950s the government of East Pakistan had the following departments:

1. Home Department
2. Finance Department
3. Commerce, Labour and Industries Department
4. Communication, Building and Irrigation Department
5. Agriculture Department
6. Education Department
7. Judicial and Registration Department
8. Food Department
9. Revenue Department
10. Jute Department
11. Salt Department
12. Public Relations Department
13. Planning Department
14. Anticorruption Department
15. Chief Minister's Secretariat
16. Health and Local Govt. Department

After L. Parnwell's Report the departments were reorganised as follows<sup>4</sup>:

1. Services and General Administration Department
2. Agriculture Department
3. Basic Democracies and Local Government Department
4. Commerce and Industries Department
5. Education Department
6. Finance Department
7. Food Department
8. Health, labour and Social Welfare Department
9. Home Department
10. Information Department
11. Law Department
12. Railway, Water and Road Transport Department
13. Relief and Rehabilitation Department
14. Revenue Department
15. Water, Power and Irrigation Department
16. Planning Department

Hence, according to the constitutional provision there should have been 16 parliamentary Secretaries only. Mr. Ghulam Faruq, the then Governor of East Pakistan, perhaps for political reasons i.e. in order to satisfy the ruling (Convention) Muslim League, took 30 Parliamentary Secretaries. Soon after it was found that the measure was unconstitutional but there was no opportunity to reduce the number of Parliamentary Secretaries. Hence the number of departments were increased instead. Some of the departments were bi-furcated or tri-furcated. Thus Health, Labour, and Social Welfare which was one department was tri-furcated into Health Department, Labour Department and Social Welfare Department.

But the difficulty was- how to provide for so many permanent Secretaries to be in charge of the administrative departments. There was non-availability of so many Secretaries, and in case

---

<sup>4</sup> *Govt. of East Pakistan, Home Department, Organisation and Methods in the East Pakistan Government, Februniy 1958, Appendix-C*

persons were available, the revenue expenditure of the increased size of establishment would have risen sky-high. So a via-media arrangement was made. It was decided that there would be no increase in the number of permanent Secretaries, rather the newly bi-furcated or trifurcated departments would be grouped together as before for the purpose of establishment under one Secretary. Now someone would be called Secretary, Health, Labour Social Welfare Department (s) and not Health, Labour, Social Welfare Department. Thus the constitutional crisis was met.

### **Reorganization of the Central and Provincial Secretariat**

In 1959, the Administrative Reorganization Committee was assigned the task of suggesting measures for reorganization of the central government Secretariat in order to cope with the increasing responsibilities of the central government. The committee in its 17<sup>th</sup> Report examined the question of reorganization of the central secretariat with a view to providing for efficient and expeditious disposal of business at the 'Branch Officer' level. In this context it considered the relative merits of the existing secretariat structure with Assistant Secretary / Under Secretary in charge of one or two Branches — each consisting of one Superintendent, 4 or 6 Assistants, 3 Clerks and one Steno-typist, and a proposed 'Section Officer Scheme' which envisaged the splitting up of a branch into two Sections under two Section Officers each having a small complement of clerical staff consisting of one Assistant and one Steno typist. The Committee considered the existing system as wasteful, cumbersome and dilatory. In their view, it led not only to inordinate delay owing to the existence of too many bottlenecks and tiers, but also the inefficiency, since cases received in the secretariat found their way to the desk of an Assistant irrespective of their importance. It would take weeks to travel up to the Assistant / Under Secretary who constituted the first line in the Secretariat hierarchy at which a decision could be taken.

Although in 1954, a Section Officer scheme was introduced as an experimental measure in some sectors of the Ministry of Finance, it did not prove very successful because the Section Officer functioned under an Assistant/under Secretary and did not possess an appropriate status or stature. The Committee recommended that the Section Officer should himself be of the status of Assistant/Under Secretary and in cases where he was not competent to take decisions himself, he should submit cases directly to the higher authority. The committee viewed that the Superintendent and Assistant who at that time played largely a dilatory role in the decision making process should be removed from the line and the Section Officer should combine the duties of the branch officer, the Superintendent and the Assistant. There was need for nearly 600 Section Officers under the scheme.

The government approved the reorganization of the central Secretariat according to the Section Officer's scheme on July 20, 1961 and directed that each Secretariat branch should be reconstituted in two sections each under the charge of a Section Officer who should combine the duties now performed by the branch officer, the Superintendent and the dealing Assistant. But normally not more than 6 to 8 Section Officers should be placed under the control of a superior officer.

Secondly, the government decided that the Section Officer should be of the rank of an Under/Assistant Secretary and should be Assisted by one Assistant and one Steno-typist. The Assistant should be responsible for putting up the case including previous papers and other references properly, flag to the Section Officer "Keeping a note of all important orders and decisions" and do any other clear function assigned to him. But he should never note on a case nor put up a draft. Government further decided that the initial method of recruitment of Section Officer should be as follows:

(a) All Assistant Secretaries and Under Secretaries should be redesigned as Section Officers.

(b) Member of the Central Superior Services and Other Class-1 Officers employed in the Central Secretariat, attached departments and subordinate offices should be eligible for appointment as Section Officers. Selection for 70% of the posts should be made by the Central Selection Board subject to the approval of the Federal Public Service Commission from amongst the Superintendents, Assistants and Other Class-II Officers, the remaining 30% of the vacancies were to be filled up by direct recruitment on the basis of the competitive examination to be held by the Federal Public Service Commission. Persons already in government service should be entitled to take the examination if they were graduate, and were below the age of 35 years. For future, however, 40% would be recruited from Officers of the CSP, other Central Superior Services and Provincial Civil Services, 10% by promotion from among the Assistants and 50% by direct recruitment.

The Section Officers were in a Central Class-1 service. A selection grade was supposed to be provided for the 6% of the post of the Section officers. Subsequently, however, it was included in Central Superior Services by opening a new cadre viz Central Secretariat Service.

It was further decided that the Joint Secretaries should not act as an intermediate step between the Deputy Secretary and Secretary but should share the Secretary's responsibility and put up ordinary cases direct to the Minister, however, to the overall control of the Secretary who should see all cases on their way back from the Minister.

On 4<sup>th</sup> February 1960, the Central Government desired that the Section Officer scheme should be enforced by the provincial government also. Accordingly, the East Pakistan Secretariat was also divided into Sections each under Section Officer and the East Pakistan Public Service Commission was assigned to choose the new recruits with a shorter examination than East Pakistan Civil

Service Examination. Initially it was a class-II position which was later up-graded to Class-I.

### **Financial Adviser's Scheme**

The preponderance of the Ministry of Finance was there in the Secretariat right from the British period. During the British time there were Financial Advisers in the departments of the Defence and the Department of Communication in the Central Government of India. In 1960 the government of Pakistan decided to introduce the Financial Adviser's scheme in all the Ministries of the Central Government. Under the directives the Central Government, provincial Government also followed suit. In June 1960 the Ministry of Finance issued a circular on the revised system of financial control and budgeting and demarcated the role of the Secretary as the Principal Accounting Officer and of the Financial Adviser of the Ministry of Finance assigned to different *Ministries*. The Principal Accounting Officer would be responsible for ensuring:

- (a) That the funds allotted to his Ministry/Divisions, each attached department or subordinate office are spent for the purpose for which they are allocated;
- (b) That the funds are spent in accordance with the relevant rules and regulations; and
- (c) That the actual expense is not more than the occasion demands and does not exceed the budget allocation.

In order to advise and assist the Principal Accounting Officer there would be Financial Advisers of Ministry of Finance. The Government decided that in each Ministry/Division there would be financial Adviser of appropriate rank with Secretariat status for advising the Secretary on all financial, budgetary and accounts matters. He would be assisted by the Deputy Financial Adviser and Assistant Financial Adviser.

Under 1960 scheme, the Financial Adviser and the officer under him were to be under the Administrative control of the Ministry/Divisions to which they were attached and should be paid from its budget but that should be borne on the cadre of Ministry of Finance. The Annual confidential report of the Financial Adviser should be written by the Secretary to the Ministry /Divisions concerned. But the scheme did not work well.

So a revised circular was issued in November 1962 by the Ministry of Finance. Under the revised scheme, the Financial Adviser attached to the administrative Ministry/Divisions should be under the administrative control of the Ministry of Finance and would exercise the power of the Ministry of Finance in relation to the Ministries/Divisions to which they were attached. The Ministry of Finance retained the power relating the interpretation and application of service regulation, allocation of foreign exchange and the provision of supplementary fund out of the 'Contingency item' in accordance with prescribed procedures.

After Independence, only the position of Deputy Financial Adviser was kept for sometime, but ultimately the scheme was abandoned. Instead, the Chief, Joint Chief, Deputy Chief, Assistant Chief, and Research Officer of the Planning Commission or Ministry/Division were mentioned in the schedule-II of the Rules of Business which contained the list of officers authorized to make and execute orders and other instruments in the name of the President.

### **Early 1970s**

During the War of Independence there were 3 sets of governments and as such 3 secretariats were in existence: the Central Secretariat of Pakistan, East Pakistan Secretariat and the Mujib Nagar Secretariat of the government-in-exile of Bangladesh. The Civil Secretariat at Mujib Nagar consisted of the following offices :

- (a) Vice President's Secretariat
- (b) Cabinet and Civil Administration
- (c) Ministry of Finance
- (d) Ministry of Law
- (e) Ministry of Education
- (f) Ministry of Defence
- (g) Ministry of Agriculture
- (h) Ministry of Home Affairs
- (i) Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- (j) Ministry of commerce and Industries

Besides there were important departments as follows :

- (a) Department of Information and Radio.
- (b) External Publicity Department
- (c) Department of Post and Telegrams
- (d) Department of Planning.

Immediately after Independence, Government of Bangladesh formed a committee to suggest ways and means of restoring civil administration in Bangladesh. The Committee, *inter-alia*, suggested the number of Ministries and other Secretariat organizations to be set up. The Committee had a tremendous task to find out the offices of the government of Paltistan and amalgamate them with the Provincial government structure in addition to setting up the new Ministries which were not found there in the Provincial secretariat. Some of the offices of the government of Pakistan as well as Government of East Pakistan had to be abolished. There were some offices of the same nature of



the former government of Pakistan and former government of East Pakistan. The following table will show the number of offices of the former government of Pakistan, which had to be amalgamated.

**Table-1**  
**Office of the Former Government of Pakistan**

<b>Ministry/Division</b>	<b>Attached Deptt./Wing/ Subordinate Office</b>	<b>Statutory/Autonomous I Semi-Autonomous</b>
Agriculture	9	2
Cabinet	3	
Communication & Transport	5	2
Defence	19	5
Education/ Cultural Affairs and Scientific and Technological Research	4	3
Establishment	2	-
Finance	13	-
Foreign Affairs	1	-
Home Affairs	7	-
Information and Broadcasting	5	5
Jute	1	3
Labour and Social Welfare and Family Planning	4	-
Law and Parliamentary Affairs	3	1
Local Government and Rural Development and Cooperatives	3	5
Relief and Rehabilitation	1	
Trade and Commerce	8	4
Works, Housing Power and Irrigation	2	

Source : (CARC Report), 1972

In the Process, a number of bodies had to be abolished or amalgamated. Thus directorate of Fisheries under the former government of East Pakistan and the department of Fisheries of the former Central government were merged together as Department of Fisheries under the Ministry of Agriculture, Refugee rehabilitation and Finance corporation was suggested to be abolished and its assets and functions transferred to the Ministry to the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, Survey of Pakistan was suggested to be transferred from the Ministry of

Agriculture to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Ministry/Directorate of Fire services was suggested to be transferred from the former BDLG department to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The Committee recommended 20 Ministries and 3 other Secretariat organizations as follows:

1. Ministry of Agriculture
2. Ministry of Cabinet Affairs
  - (a) Cabinet Division
  - (b) Establishment Division
3. Ministry of Communication and Transport
4. Ministry of Defence
5. Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Scientific and Technological Research.
6. Ministry of Finance and Revenue.
7. Ministry of Food
8. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
9. Ministry of Health
10. Ministry of Home Affairs.
11. Ministry of Industries and Mineral Resources
12. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
13. Ministry of Jute
14. Ministry of Labour, Social Welfare and Family Planning
15. Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs
16. Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives.
17. Ministry of Planning.
18. Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation
19. Ministry of Trade & Commerce
20. Ministry of Works, Housing, Power and Irrigation

#### Other Secretariat Organisations

1. President's Secretariat
2. Prime Minister's Secretariat
3. National Assembly Secretariat.

Actually 25 Ministries and two Secretariats were established, the secretariats being the President's Secretariat and the Prime Minister's Secretariat. The Cabinet Affairs was a ministry with effect from January 25, 1975 and it consisted of

1. Cabinet Division
2. Establishment Division
3. Secretariat of the President
  - (a) General Affairs
  - (b) Economic Affairs
  - (c) Personal Affairs

This was again changed on November 10, 1975 and Cabinet Secretariat Constituted of

1. Establishment Division
2. Cabinet Division

But again on 16-8-77 the structure of the secretariat was changed as follows:

- (1) President's Secretariat .
  - (a) President's Division (Personal)
  - (b) President's Division (Public)
  - (c) Women Affairs Division
- (2) Cabinet Secretariat
  - (a) Cabinet Division
  - (b) Establishment Division

The structure continued as such until 25 March, 1981 when it was changed as follow:

- (1) President's Secretariat
  - (a) President's Division (Personal)
  - (b) General Economics Division
  - (c) Information Division
- (2) Cabinet Secretariat
  - (a) Cabinet Division
  - (b) Establishment Division
  - (c) Science and Technology Division

In March 1982 when Martial Law was proclaimed, there was an initial confusion about the powers of the civil and military authorities. In July, 1982 the following revised structure was declared:

- (1) President's Secretariat
  - (a) Public Division
  - (b) Personal Division
  
- (2) CMLA Secretariat
  - (a) Cabinet Division
  - (b) Establishment Division
  - (c) Project Monitoring Bureau
  - (d) Science and Technology Division
  - (e) Election Commission
  - (f) Parliament Secretariat
  - (g) Martial law and Civil Affairs Division.

Side by side, the number of ministries was reduced. The Schedule 1 (Allocation of Business) of December 1979 showed 32 ministries and three Secretariats (President Secretariat, Prime Minister's Secretariat and Parliament Secretariat) while that of June, 1981 showed 33 ministries and 3 Secretariats as above. But in July, 1982 the number of Ministries was reduced to 17 along with 2 secretariat (President secretariat, CMLA Secretariat). In August 1983 one more ministry was added by naming Establishment Division as Ministry of Establishment and Reorganization. The Project Monitoring Bureau was renamed as Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division under CMLA Secretariat and Sports and Cultural Affairs Division was created within the CMLA Secretariat.

However, the number of ministries shot up to 29 in December 1984 and Prime Minister's Secretariat was added to already existing President Secretariat and CMLA Secretariat.

The list of ministries published by the Cabinet Division on August 13, 1995 dropped the word 'Reorganization' from Ministry of Establishment and new ministries like Ministry of Social and Women Affairs, Ministry of Youth and sports and Ministry of Religious Affairs were added. Besides, only the Martial Law and Civil Affairs Division was kept under CMLA

Secretariat; Science and Technology Division was transferred to the Ministry of Education: Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division was placed under the Ministry of Planning. President Secretariat showed Public Division, Personal division, Election Commission and Parliament Secretariat. The position list placed on November 18, 1986 remained essentially the same with addition of the term 'secretariat' after Election commission under President Secretariat and addition of two ministries in the list viz., Ministry of Jute and Textiles and Civil Aviation and Tourism Division so long under Ministry of Defence which emerged as a separate Ministry. Besides, Ministry of Health and Family Planning was named Ministry of Health and Population control (later: Health and Family Welfare).

The above arrangement continued until Public Service Commission Secretariat was upgraded and placed under the President secretariat Division list: There was some speculation to add another Comptroller and Auditor General Secretariat to President's Secretariat, but the idea was dropped later. The Election Commission, the Public service Commission and the position of Comptroller and Auditor General are constitutional positions and hence there was an apparent anomaly to put their secretariats in the list of ministries and divisions. However, although the position of Comptroller and Auditor General is a constitutional one, his office was already an attached department of Ministry of Finance. In addition, Special Affairs Division was created (renamed later).

### **Subsequent Changes**

With the 12<sup>th</sup> amendment of the Constitution and restoration of parliamentary government in Bangladesh, there occurred a structural and functional change in the governmental job-task-pyramid. Since the President is to act in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister was declared

as head of government, most of the responsibilities hitherto assigned to the President was transferred to the Prime Minister. Under a Cabinet Division circular, Prime Minister is to receive all the files hitherto earmarked for the President. The Prime Minister would decide which file would require the approval of the President, otherwise disposal of business would be done at this level except the appointment and resignation of Prime Minister and the Chief Justice which would be dealt by the President directly. The President's Secretariat had been renamed as President's Office with a short structure having only one Division viz., Public and Personal division. The Personal Division so long headed by Military Secretary was renamed as Military Secretary's wing under the Public and Personal Division. The other divisions of the President Secretariat had been transferred to the Prime Minister's Secretariat. The Special Affairs Division which dealt with tribal matters was first transferred to the Prime Minister's Office and then turned into a full Ministry viz, Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs. Supreme command Headquarters Division was renamed as Armed Forces Division to bring it under the Prime Minister and was assigned with the responsibilities like preparation of Defence policy plan and monitoring treaty commitments; planning, coordinating and arranging mobilisation of Defence Services on Declaration of National Emergency /war; coordinating and controlling the activities of Defence services when deployed in aid of civil power; Foreign military delegation; welfare of ex-service men etc. Some Ministries were renamed. For example, Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation was first turned into Ministry of Relief and finally into Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief. Parliament Secretariat and Bangladesh Public Service Commission secretariat were given special status.

But the result was that the number of ministries increased year to year. The following table would speak for it.

**Table 2**  
**Number of Ministries (1972-2000)**

Year	Number of Ministries
1972	21
1975	26
1975 (after 4 <sup>th</sup> Amendment)	13
1977	33
1978	24
1980	30
1982 (after Martial Law Proclamation)	19
1991 (after restoration of Parliamentary govt.)	33
1995	35
2000	36

**Source:** Report of the Public Administration Reform commission, Vol-I (June 2000) para 4.07

The tendency of increasing the number of ministries continued so much that the Allocation of Business (Revised up to August 2000) enumerated 42 ministries including President's office, Prime Minister's office, Armed Forces Division and Cabinet division. By subsequent notification, however, some ministries were reorganized and renamed. The name of the Ministry of Labour and Manpower, for example, was changed into Ministry of Labour and Employment. Two new Ministries, viz, Ministry of Liberation War Affairs and Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment emerged totalling the number of Ministries and equivalents as 43 in December 2001<sup>8</sup>.

In the Rules of Business 1975 Secretary was named as the official Head of the Ministry/Division, but in the Rules of Business 1996 the designation was changed into Administrative head and the responsibility of the Minister in relation to the Ministry/Division was enhanced with accountability to Parliament. The Secretary, however, continued to be the Principal Accounting

---

<sup>8</sup> *Covt of Bangladesh, Bangladesh gazette, Extra ordinary dated October 25, 2001. PP. 1993-4*

Officer of the Ministry/Division, Attached Departments and subordinate offices.<sup>9</sup>

### **A Comparison**

During the British Period, the secretariat at the central government was the 'eye and ear' of the Governor General. So was it for the governors in the provinces. It was, so to say, a nerve centre, a data bank, a data analysis centre and the top decision-making organ of the Government. The higher echelon of the Secretariat ladder used to be manned by the members of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) who had the vast experience at the field-level as well as various directorates and other operating agencies.

However, the main objective of the secretariat was to look after the British interest in this country and the main thrust was on supervision of revenue administration and law and order. The secretariat had hardly to plan any developmental function except as corollaries of the two functions mentioned above. Regulating and controlling were the main functions of the secretariat at that time.

Yet, the record keeping was excellent, and there was the mastery of English Language in noting and drafting. Even the lower level officials were highly trained persons.

During the Pakistan Period, a lot of experimentation was made with the structure and functions of the secretariat. To mention some are: Section officers' scheme and the scheme of Financial Advisors. A lot of co-ordination was also needed between the Central Secretariat and the Provincial Secretariat, and obviously

---

<sup>9</sup> rule 4 of the Rules of Business 1996. By executive orders the positions of Administrative Officer and Personnel Officer were created. A Ministry /Division has wings. Branches and Sections as before. The designation of senior scale Section officer/section officer were again changed into Senior Assistant Secretary/Assistant Secretary. Administrative Officers are to assist them.



the central secretariat had the preponderance over the provincial secretariat.

Most of the top-officials of the secretariat were CSPs and ex-ICS officers. A Deputy Secretary of the central government, was usually a person who had the experience of serving as a District Magistrate / Deputy Commissioner in the field.

It was a special feature of the secretariat during the Pakistan Period that the secretariat officials had clear-cut responsibilities and the officials used to be asserting. An Assistant secretary/section officer could give decisions on routine matters and the matters which had clear precedence. A Joint Secretary could even submit the file directly to the Minister for the matters relating to his wing.

Yet, because of the political changes and changed situations, occasionally conflicts arose between the Minister and the secretary. Hence there was the need to earmark the jurisdiction of the Minister and the Secretary. L. Parnwell Report 1958 reads (para 120).

*An essential requirement in a Secretary is that he should be a first class administrator. He is not (save by accident) a specialist in anything; but rather the general adviser of the Minister, the general manager and controller under the Minister, with the ultimate responsibility to the Minister for all activities of the department.*

But as Pakistan experienced long years of Military Rule, secretaries gained and accumulated powers in the political vacuum. But hardly anybody gruded against it. There was, however, the preponderance of the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance as Pakistan embarked into a number of developmental projects.

After Independence, Bangladesh Secretariat emerged. As already stated, it was a fusion of Mujib-Nagar secretariat, Central Secretariat of Pakistan and Provincial Secretariat of East Pakistan. Rank, status and background differed and yet they had to be unified and amalgamated. In the initial years till late 1975, there was no Rules of Business. Hence executive discretion was preponderant.

The generalist/ specialist's controversy, introduction and abolition of Policy / Senior Service Pool etc. added to already existing confusion. Introduction of 29 cadres and their quota in the secretariat changed the nature of the Secretariat, sometimes for better but sometimes for worse. Absence of trained persons was easily observable.

There was late notification of levels of Disposals and Distribution of work in several Ministries. But even if there is one, files are put up to the higher echelon because nobody wants to take risk. For example, Distribution of work of the Ministry of Commerce (No 9(3)/77-Admin-1/853 dt. 14.0.87 (as amended) showed 28 items for the secretary, 16 items for Additional Secretary and 27 items for the Joint Secretary. A Joint Secretary is supposed to make decisions on minor policy matters and under secretariat Instruction 1976 even submit the file direct to the Minister for matters concerning his wing. But in actual practice, files are often pushed upwards.

## **Conclusion**

What is after all the role and value of the secretariat? Incidentally, excepting the administrative system of the countries of the British and French origin, many countries of the world are not even familiar with the term 'secretariat' and do not understand the secretariat-Directorate dichotomy. Shoab Committee during the Pakistan period termed the secretariat as the 'braintrust' of the

cabinet. The value of the Secretariat lies there, if it works properly within its limits.

Even our Rules of Business enumerates the role of the ministries/Divisions i.e. Secretariat as:<sup>10</sup>

- (a) Policy formulation
- (b) Planning
- (c) Evaluation of execution of plans
- (d) Legislative measures
- (e) Assisting the Minister in discharge of his responsibilities to the Parliament
- (f) Personnel management at the top level.
- (g) Such other matter/matters as may be determined by the Prime Minister from time to time.

Unfortunately, many a time secretariat officials are found to be bogged down in dealing with non-secretariat functions for political, personal or other reasons. On the other hand, many functions already delegated to attached departments and public corporations/autonomous bodies are often referred to the Secretariat for decision because nobody wants to take any risk. Similarly, although level of Disposal of the individual ministry delegates decision making power within the secretariat to a lower level, often the file is referred to the higher level. This was one of the reasons why Administrative Reorganization Committee 1993 (Report 1996) and Public Administration Reforms Commission 1996 (Report 2000) constituted by the two successive governments recommended for reducing the size of the Secretariat and limiting the functions of some ministries and divisions. ARC had recommended for 26 ministries<sup>11</sup> and PARC recommended for 25 ministries<sup>12</sup>

---

10. Govt of Bangladesh, Cabinet Division, Rules of Business, 1996, rule 4 (ix)

১১. গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার, সংস্থাপন মন্ত্রণালয়, প্রশাসনিক পুনর্বিন্যাস কমিটি প্রতিবেদন: সমাপ্তিপত্র, ১৯৯৬, পরিশিষ্ট জ

১২. গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার, মন্ত্রী পরিষদ বিভাগ, জন প্রশাসন সংস্কার কমিশন প্রতিবেদন (১ম খণ্ড) ২০০০ সংযুক্তি ৪.২

It is also to be observed that Secretariat decisions do not often follow time limit set in the Secretariat Instructions itself. Secretariat instructions set time limits for Assistant Secretariat as 72 hours, for Deputy secretaries as 48 hours and for other senior officers as 24 hours<sup>13</sup>. It is found in a study made by some eminent researchers of BPATC that the average time taken in some sample cases was much more than the limit set by the Secretariat Instructions. The following table will speak for it:

Table-3

## Average Duration for Disposal of Cases in the Secretariat

(Number of Days)

Ministry	Level				
	Asst. Secy	Dy. Secy	Jt. Secy	Addl. Secy	Secretary
Land	11	2	7	-	9
Relief and Rehabilitation (Later : Disaster Management and Relief)	4	1	2	0	2
Education	7	1	2	1	4
Local Govt.	8	2	1		2
Health & FP (Later: Health and FW)	10	2	2		1
Commerce	7	1	1	1	2
All Ministries	8	1	2	1	2

*Source:* A.T.M Shamsul Huda and Mustafa A. Rahman, "Functions and Functionaries's of the Bangladesh Secretariat," *Bangladesh Journal of Public Administration*" (BPATC Journal) Vol. IV, No 1 (January 1990) P.15

<sup>13</sup> Govt of Bangladesh, Ministry of Establishment, Secretariat Instructions, 1976, rule 185

Delays in decision making occur for several reasons. Some of the important reasons, as enumerated by the Public administration Efficiency Study, include:<sup>14</sup>

- a. non-adherence to procedures laid down in the Secretariat Instructions and the Rules of Business;
- b. lack of enforcement of accountability;
- c. work overload;
- d. lack of logistical support; and
- e. lack of well trained personnel.

PARC has also pointed out that one of the main reasons for delay is insufficient delegation of authority to the appropriate level.

But in spite of defects and deficiencies it can be said that Secretariat is a *sine qua non* in our administrative system. Administrative Reforms Commission of India had remarked:"

*The Secretariat system of work, with all its deficiencies, has lent balance, consistency and continuity to the administration and served as a nucleus for the total machinery of a ministry. It has facilitated inter-ministry coordination and accountability to Parliament.*

The same holds good with the situation in our country. As an institutionalized system it is now indispensable in a country like

---

<sup>14</sup> Govt of Bangladesh, Ministry, of Establishment, *Report of the Public Administration Efficiency Study*, Vol. 2 (*Secretariat System and Work Procedures*), 1989. p.30 See also in this connection Govt. of Bengal, L.A Chapman Report 1938 paras 6-50

<sup>15</sup> Govt of India, Administrative Reforms Commission, *Report on the Machine? of the Government of India and its Procedure of work*. 1968. p.30

<sup>16</sup> The World Bank, *Government that Works: Reforming the Public Sector: Bangladesh*, 1996, P.141

ours. What is needed is that the system fully answers the changed and changing circumstances keeping in mind the needs and wishes of the people.

This requires a vision and an altitudinal change. The motto of the political system should be good governance and social change for people's betterment. A World Bank study report noted that since Independence, the size of our government has virtually doubled in terms of Ministries / Departments and officials. But what is absent is a concomitant shedding of some lower priority responsibilities or any attempt to eliminate redundancy. It categorically observed as follows:<sup>16</sup>

*Bangladesh will be a different country as it enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century This is not a matter of choice..... there **will** be a smaller but more effective, responsive and accountable government.... the government will have withdrawn entirely from functions it now currently performs either because these tasks are no longer needed or because they can be better financed and delivered by the private sector.*

Let our future Secretariat be less bureaucratic and rather a catalyst for public welfare and a focal point for service delivery system for the huge developmental work of the country which lies ahead.

**Appendix-1**

**Changing Secretariat Structure**

	Early British Period	Late British Period	Early Pakistan Period	Late Pakistan Period	Bangladesh Period (early year)	Bangladesh (As of now)
Structure	9 central departments in 1919 Manned mainly of European officials	9 central departments in 1939 Manned by covenanted Civil Service and later Indian Civil Service	In 1947, 9 prewar departments & 19 post war department renamed as Ministries in the central govt. in 1950 16 department in govt. of East Pakistan. Preponderance of Ex ICS and CSP	In 1962, 23 Division in the central govt. in govt. of East Pakistan 30 department preponderance of ESPs and EPCSs. Section officer scheme was introduced	In 1971 10 Ministry at Mujibnag or. In 1972 25 Ministries and equivalent Preponderance of presidents scett and sometimes Military Bureau-cracy	43 Ministries or equivalent Preponderance of PM's office No financial Admn.
Main Functions	Giving guidance to European supervisor (later, Collector)	Policy assistance to British Raj	Mainly involved in Administrative reorganization and preparing guidelines for development	supervision of Attended deputies of offices	Mainly involved in Administrative reorganization	Policy support to elected govt.
Qualities	High excellence in Revenue matter	Excellent in controlling and regulating	Quality somewhat fell as many ICS officers left	Quality further fell for political upheavals	Confusion in decision making language deficiency was observed	Quality fall particularly in lower Bureau-cracy
Ministerial responsibility		Yet distinction between reserved subject and transferred subject	Prepondence of Cabinet Division and Establishment Division	Prepondence of planning and Finance Ministry and Financial Adviser	Prepondence of Secretaries, as official head and Principal Account officer	Ministerial responsibility asserted secretary is the administrative head.

**REFERENCES**

- Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Constitution of the Islamic *Republic of* Pakistan, 1956
- Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, *Constitution of* Pakistan, 1962
- Government of Bangladesh Constitution of *the Republic of* Bangladesh, 1972
- Government of Pakistan, Cabinet Division, *Rules of Business*, 1962
- Government of Pakistan, Cabinet Division, Allocation of Business, 1965
- Government of Bangladesh, Cabinet Division, Rules of Business, 1975
- Government of Bangladesh, Cabinet Division, *Rules of Business*, 1996
- Government of Bangladesh, Cabinet Division, Allocation of Business, 2000
- Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Establishment, Secretariat Instructions, 1976
- Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhuri, *The Civil Service of Pakistan*, Dhaka: NIPA, 1969
- Government of East Pakistan, Home Department, Organization and Methods in the East Pakistan Government, 1958
- Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Establishment, Report of the Civil *Administration Restoration Committee*, 1972
- Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Establishment, Report of the *Administrative Reorganization Committee*, 1996
- Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Establishment, Report of the Public Administration *Efficiency Study*, 1989
- Government of Bangladesh, Cabinet Division, Report of the *Public Administration Reforms Commission*, 2000



Government of India, *Report on the Machinery of the Government*, 1996

The World Bank, *Government that Works, Reforming Public Sector: Bangladesh*, 1996

Bangladesh Public Administration Training Center, *Bangladesh Journal of Public Administration*, Vol IV, No1 (1990)

Government of Bangladesh, *Bangladesh Gazette, Extra Ordinary* dated October 25,2001