

CABINET SECRETARIAT

Meaning

The constitutional of India for a Parliamentary system of government with Cabinet as the real executive. The Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister is responsible for the entire administration of the Government of India (i.e. Central administration). In this task, the Cabinet is assisted by the Cabinet Secretariat.

Thus, the Cabinet Secretariat is a staff agency to the Union Cabinet. It operates under the direction and leadership of the Prime Minister of India. It has an important coordinating role in the process of policy-making at the highest level in the Central Government.

The Cabinet Secretariat enjoys the status of a department of the Government of India under the Allocation of Business Rules, 1961. It is headed politically, by the Prime Minister and administratively, by the Cabinet Secretary.

The Cabinet Secretariat came into existence in 1947 by replacing the Secretariat of the Governor-General's Executive Council.

Organization

The Cabinet Secretariat has three wings- Civil Wing, Military Wing and intelligence wing. The civil wing is the main and provides aid, advice, and assistance to the Union Cabinet. The military wing provides secretarial assistance to the Defence Committee of the Cabinet, the Military Affairs Committee, the National Defence Council and other committee dealing with Defence matters. The intelligence wing deals with matters pertaining to the Joint Intelligence Committee of the Union Cabinet.

Besides the main secretariat, the cabinet secretariat comprises of the following organization:

- (i) Research and Analysis Wing (RAW)
- (ii) Director General of Security
- (iii) Special Protection Group
- (iv) Director of Public Grievances

In 1997, the National Authority, Chemical Weapons Convention was set up by a resolution of the cabinet secretariat. It is under the administrative control of the cabinet secretariat.

In 1988, the Directorate of Public Grievances was set up as an organ of the Cabinet Secretariat. It is headed by a Director having the rank of a Secretary to the Government of India. It deals with the public grievances relating to the following organizations of the Central Government.

- (i) Departments of railways, telecommunications and posts.
- (ii) Ministers of surface transportation, civil aviation and urban development.
- (iii) Insurance and banking division of the Development of Economic Affairs of the Ministry of Finance.

(IV) Directorate General of Shipping and Port Trust, Delhi Transport Corporation, Indian Airlines and Air India.

Below and under the Cabinet Secretary, there are a large number of other secretaries to assist him in the discharge of his functions and responsibilities. These secretaries belong to various ranks ranging from Secretary to an Under Secretary. In addition, the Cabinet Secretariat

has subject related advisors to the Prime Minister.

Role and Functions

The following functions are performed by the Cabinet Secretariat.

(i) It prepares agenda for the Cabinet and provides necessary information and material for its deliberations.

(ii) It keeps a record of the discussions and decision of the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees and circulates them to all the concerned ministers.

(iii) It provides secretarial assistance to the Cabinet committees-Political Affairs Committees (described as Super Cabinet), Economic Affairs Committee, Appointments Committee (all three chaired by the Prime Ministers) and Committee on Parliament Affairs (Chairman-Home Ministers).

(iv) It keeps the President, Vice-PRESIDENT AND ALL THE Central Ministers informed of the main activities of the Central Government.

(v) It prepares the finalizes the rules of business of the government and allots the business of the Government among Ministers/departments of the Union Government with the President's approval.

(vi) It functions as the chief coordinate agency in the Central Government. In this respect, it settles disputes between the ministers.

(vii) It watches the implementation of Cabinet decisions by the Concerned ministers/departments and other executive agencies.

(viii) It handles the works pertaining to appointment and resignation of ministers, allotments of portfolios to the ministers, and organization and re-organization of ministers.

Avasthi and Avasthi have classified the role of cabinet secretariat under the following four heads:

(i) Its role as the secretariat of the cabinet.

(ii) Its role as an originating departments.

(iii) Its role as a coordinating departments.

(iv) Its role in implementing decisions of the cabinet.

Cabinet Secretary

The office of Cabinet Secretary was created in India in 1950. Its first occupant was N.R.Pillai.

A Cabinet Secretary is the head of the Cabinet Secretariat. He succeeded the Secretary to the Governor-General's Executive Council.

He is given a top place among the civil servants in the official warrant of Precedence. Thus, he is the senior most civil servant in India. Such a status of a Cabinet Secretary was recommended by the Gopalaswamy Ayyangar Report on Reorganization of the Machinery of Government (1949). However, his tenure of office is not fixed.

The following points highlights the role, powers and functions of a Cabinet Secretary.

(i) He is the chief coordinator of Central administration. But, he has no supervisory function over minister/departments

(ii) He is a Chairman of the Senior Selection Board which selects officers for the post of Joint Secretary in the Central Secretariat.

(iii) He himself selects the officers for the posts of Secretary and Additional Secretary in the Central Secretariat.

(iv) He is the Chairman of the Committee of Secretariat on Administration which is set up to resolve inter-ministerial disputes.

(v) He presides over the Conference of Chief Secretaries which is held annually.

(vi) He serves on occasions as a factotum when the Prime Minister deems necessary and calls him to be so.

On the role of a Cabinet Secretary, S.S. Khera, a former Cabinet Secretary, in his book, *The Central Executive*, observe that, "Cabinet Secretary provides the eyes and ears for the Prime Minister to keep in touch with the process of official business in the Central Government. But he is in no sense a watchdog or an invigilator on behalf of the Prime Minister....A Cabinet Secretary's is a very general staff function, not a line function in relation to the ministers. His business is to help, not to oversee."

The Administrative Reforms Commission in its Report on the Machinery of Government and its Procedures of Work (1968) made the following recommendations with regard to the status and role of a Cabinet Secretary.

(i) He should act as a general coordinator of Central administration, but his role should not be limited to that of only a coordinator.

(ii) He should also act as a principal staff advisor to the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and its committees on important policy matters.

(iii) The advice given by him on policy matters should be tendered by him at his own level

instead of being passed down to his juniors in the Cabinet Secretariat.

(iv) He, to be effective, should have a tenure 3 to 4 years.

The Gopaldaswamy Ayyangar Report on Reorganisation of the Machinery of Government (1949) made the following recommendations with regard to the status and role of a Cabinet Secretary.

(i) He should be an administrative officer of the highest rank, selected for the office for his special qualities of tact, energy, initiative and efficiency.

(ii) He should be entrusted, as head of the Cabinet Secretariat, with positive function of securing coordination as well as timely and effective action by all departments of the Government in all matters in which the Cabinet as a whole or the Prime Minister is interested.

(iii) He should be a sufficiently senior officer so as to command the confidence and respect of all heads of departments.

(iv) He should be ex-officio president of the committee of secretaries set up to advise the Prime Minister and other ministers on selection for administrative appointments.

(v) His status in the service should be such as to entitle him to be regarded as the first member of the public services under the control of the Central Government, and one in whose judgment and impartiality the government as well as the services, could rely implicitly.