

EMPOWERMENT OF SECRETARIES' COMMITTEES AND STRENGTHENING THE POST OF CABINET SECRETARY

There is a widespread impression that Federal Government business suffers from a fragmented approach. Consultation inter-se-among Ministries/Divisions is patchy, unsystematic and not as smooth or frequent as it should be. Effective coordination is lacking and conflict resolution mechanism among the ministries is not satisfactory. Inter-ministerial matters therefore linger on causing delays. Even relatively mundane inter-Ministerial disputes/differences have to be resolved at the highest levels. In the provinces, this role is being performed by the Chief Secretary. To improve the quality of overall decision making and relieve the highest decision makers from the drudgery of mundane affairs of the state it is proposed to strengthen the office of the Cabinet Secretary and also make effective use of the Secretaries' Committee.

2. The role of Cabinet Division is, inter alia, to provide support for holding meetings of the Cabinet, Cabinet Committees and promote inter-Ministerial/ inter-Divisional coordination through Secretaries Committee. Cabinet Division is also responsible for administrative structures of the government, ensuring adherence to the Rules of Business and monitoring implementation of decisions made by the Cabinet and its Committees. Similarly, Establishment Division is responsible for all Human Resource and Personnel Management policies and their implementation in the public sector both these divisions are directly under the control of the Prime Minister.

3. The role of these important Divisions, which constitute Cabinet Secretariat, has dwindled with the passage of time and they are unable to perform their assigned functions efficiently and effectively. There is a need to restore an avenue for the Secretaries of the Government to get their operational difficulties resolved to improve coordination among various ministries and to develop a low cost dispute and conflict resolution mechanism. This, in turn, would have a positive impact on the overall performance of the government. The Commission is of the view that the problem faced by the Federal Government due to inadequate coordination among the various Ministries at the operational level in day to day matters can be resolved by bringing about two important structural changes.

- a. The first change is to strengthen the office of the Cabinet Secretary by making him first among equals and vesting him with the same powers as enjoyed by the Chief Secretary at the Provincial level. This practice will not be novel in case of Pakistan as it was in force for several decades nor will it be unique as both India and U.K. are very much following it. To make this office effective the senior most Secretary of the Government should be made the Cabinet Secretary for a fixed tenure. The Secretaries can turn to him for advice, counseling and guidance while the Prime Minister may seek his advice on matters of important consequences.
 - b. The second change is to tap on the collective wisdom and experience of the Federal and Provincial Secretaries by making extensive use of the Secretaries Committee. The present tendency of over centralization of decision making by pushing most of the problems and even straightforward issues in their lap can be curbed by delegating some specified powers of inter-ministerial coordination and dispute resolution to these committees. This will strengthen the leadership qualities of the secretaries as they will work as a collective team and force them to take decisions not on the basis of narrow considerations of protecting their turf but in the larger national interests. This will also free up the time of the PM and CMs who will be able to devote quality time to more contentious and difficult issues that cannot be resolved at the secretaries level and to exercise strategic oversight. It is also believed that the inordinate delays that occur in the decision making will also be reduced through this process.
4. Approval of the Steering Committee is solicited to the proposals made in Para 3 (a) and (b) above.