CHAPTER V

EXECUTIVE AND PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING IN INDIA

The administration of the country is run by the executive. Executive Government is a continuous process, which must be carried on uninterruptedly. A distinction is made between political executive and non-political or permanent executive. Political executive is the real executive who is responsible to the legislature in a Parliamentary form of Government and is non-permanent. Non-political executive is permanent and includes the general body of officials serving under the heads of various administrative departments. It is otherwise known as 'bureaucrats' or 'civil servants'.\(^1\) Normally, it is the political executive who takes policy decisions and sets down the guidelines and general pattern of administration. The execution of those decisions and the application of policy guidelines to individual cases is left to the civil servants.\(^2\)

Political Executive

In a democratic polity, public policies are formulated by the political executive in the light of the mandate it receives from the people and in consonance with its political ideology.\(^3\) Political executives have many names and titles like President, Prime Minister or Premier, Chairman, etc. Their duties and powers also vary. Political executives are effective
only if they have genuine powers in the enactment and implementation of laws and regulations. E.g., the American President. If they do not have these powers, they are symbolic or ceremonial. E.g., the British Queen and the President of India.

The influence of the political executive is circumscribed by the limits on public policy-making, which is set by the facts the policy must deal with, and by the power and interest of other persons and policy-making units. Nevertheless, political executives greatly influence not only policy-making in discrete cases, but also the general style of policy-making. The personal qualities of such leaders and their working methods are therefore important determinants of public policy-making.5

The political executive is the locus of leadership in the political system and the executive's energy, ideas, imagination, and resolution provides stabilizing and adaptive capacity to the political system. Typically, the executive is the most important structure in policy-making. The political executive normally initiates new policies and, depending on the division of powers between the executive and the legislature, has a substantial part in their adoption. He also oversees the implementation of policies, and can hold subordinate officials accountable for their performance.
India has a Parliamentary form of Government. The President is the titular head of State and the Prime Minister who is the head of Government and leader of the majority party in Parliament exercises executive authority. The Prime Minister enjoys a special position in the realm of public policy-making and other Ministers play varying levels of subordinate role. The stamp of the Prime Minister on public policy-making is deep, pervasive and indelible. The high position of the Prime Minister as head of the Council of Ministers invests him with the special responsibility to see that the institution functions as a team and also that the rule of collective responsibility is effectively enforced. His task does not stop here and he verifies whether the policies are objective and realistic after due study. He ensures prompt and effective implementation of policies because the administration is responsible to the people's needs, and here the objectives enshrined in the Constitution are kept in view.

Prime Ministerial power is not a constant factor. It varies according to the strength, style and aptitude of the individual Prime Minister, and the ability, experience and determination of his colleagues. Much depends on the personality of the holder of the office, the support that he enjoys in his Cabinet, the strength of his party in the Parliament and the country, and the political and socio-economic conditions of the time. In this context the position of the Prime Minister in India has not remained the same throughout.
For details regarding the different Prime Minister's in India since Independence, refer Appendix-VIII.

Jawaharlal Nehru of the Congress Party was the first Prime Minister of independent India. The Congress Party organisation, in the early years after Independence, was dominated by Sardar Patel, who was also the most powerful Minister in the Cabinet after Nehru and was recognised as Nehru's equal in all other respects. However, after Patel's death in December 1950, Nehru forced Patel's candidate, Purushottamdas Tandon, to resign the Congress presidency, which Nehru then assumed himself for the next four years.

Nehru's personality, attitude, and style of leadership influenced profoundly all aspects of the functioning of the Indian political system during the period of his dominance. Nehru asserted effectively and decisively the primacy of the office of the Prime Minister against challenges from the President and from the Congress organisation.

Nehru articulated a clear set of ideological and policy goals, which included a commitment to a non-dogmatic form of socialism, to secularism, economic development through State-directed planning, and non-alignment in international affairs. Success in achieving specific policies included under these broad goals was often limited, but they always provided a clear social and economic orientation, direction, and cohesion to State policies.
Nehru propounded the principles of India’s economic policy in the Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948, which was basically a compromise document accommodating the interests of the private sector, foreign capital and also Gandhian village and cottage industries. It envisaged the creation of a mixed economy. However, economic growth offered no answer to increasing poverty and unemployment. The Gandhians attributed this to the neglect of the village and cottage industries, while the socialists advocated large-scale industrial production as its only solution.

Nehru therefore sought to steer a middle course of a ‘socialistic pattern of society’, a policy objective which was endorsed by the Congress session held at Avadi, Madras, in January, 1955. The objective so approved at Avadi was later incorporated as part of the Government’s Industrial Policy Resolution presented to Parliament on April 30, 1956. Although the Resolution expanded the scope of public sector development, it also allocated extensive areas to the private sector, guaranteed existing private sector facilities from nationalisation, and provided for their eventual expansion.

Following this, though there was initially a massive industrial boom in the early 1960s, the economy began to falter, when achievements began to fall far short of plan targets, and poverty was not relieved. Big business complexes
had grown rapidly. The Reports of the Mahalanobis Committee and the Monopolies Inquiry Commission in 1964, pointed out the concentration of economic power in the hands of a few select business houses. These influenced the Government policy through heavy contributions made to political parties, more specifically to the ruling party. Thus, the growth of monopolies took place under the administration of Nehru himself, a declared advocate of socialism.

The Congress Government under Nehru did not lag behind in promises, but it invariably failed in implementation. The promise-performance gap of Nehru's Government was due to the fact that the declared and accepted role of public ownership was diluted under pressure politics by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), a pressure group of the business community, both at the stage of policy formulation and implementation.

In the field of foreign policy, India's heavy consequences in the Indo-China War in 1962, resulted in Nehru's leadership being challenged within his own party. The executive committee of the Congress Party in Parliament flatly rejected his insistence on keeping his failed Defence Minister, V.K. Krishna Menon, and Nehru had to yield. Also Nehru's idea of 'Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai, the fraternal pretense, was shaken, and all these made the foreign policy of Nehru a failure.11 Henry
Hart views that the policy failure of Nehru's China War was due to his relative isolation in the process of policy-making, and he points out that tremendous concentration of power in one individual has negative consequences on policy performance.\(^\text{12}\)

Upon Nehru's death in 1964, the Syndicate of the Congress Party, and especially Kamaraj as Party president, took control of the party organisation, and played a critical role in the succession to Nehru. Thus, the end of the Nehru era and the process of succession had resulted in the emergence of a collective leadership in the Congress and a decision-making process based on consensus. Party leaders and the Chief Ministers of the states pressed for a share of power, and major policies could be decided only with the assent of the state Governments or state-level Congress bosses. Lal Bahadur Shastri, who was Nehru's immediate successor, had to show a decision-making style and temperament that was well suited to these circumstances. By the end of 1965, particularly after the India-Pakistan conflict, Shastri emerged as a prominent leader, but died in January 1966.\(^\text{13}\)

Mrs. Indira Gandhi succeeded Shastri as Prime Minister. There was an intra-party struggle within the Congress. Though the struggle was couched in ideological terms, the power of the Prime Minister as opposed to that of the Syndicate of the Congress Party organisation was at stake. In this context, the
Prime Minister's populist policies to nationalize banks, abolish privy purses, and end the privileges of former princes were not part of a broader campaign for social justice but were rather part of a struggle for power within the party. Finally, the Congress split in November 1969. The emphasis on both sides was on the choice of personalities to give weight to the respective positions they held rather than policies considered necessary in the best interest of the country.

Early in 1971, Mrs. Gandhi called a special Parliamentary election. With her simple appeal of 'Garibi Hatao' (Out with Poverty), she drew a line all could understand. A fundamental political issue was posed and decided by reference to a clear commitment to policy goals — removal of poverty, unemployment, redistribution of income and wealth to reduce disparities, and actions to provide justice for the deprived and neglected sections of society. Mrs. Gandhi's overwhelming victory gave a clear mandate to her new Government. She said to the new Parliament through the President's Address, 'My Government has been returned to office on the clear pledge that the central objective of our policy must be the abolition of poverty.' However, 'Garibi Hatao' failed. The Congress Party had adopted a policy which was not even honoured by its own leaders. This inability to fulfil her 1971 election promise to abolish poverty gave credibility to the charge of Opposition Leaders that Mrs. Gandhi was interested only in clinging to
office. In 1973-74, food shortages and rising prices combined with local political grievances to produce major popular demonstrations and movements that turned violent in the states of Gujarat and Bihar could not be handled effectively by the Chief Ministers appointed by Mrs.Gandhi in those states. Inside the Congress, a small group of Members of Parliament were becoming discontented with Mrs.Gandhi's economic policies.

The Allahabad High Court precipitated matters by finding Mrs.Gandhi's 1971 election invalid on the grounds of corrupt practices, in an election petition filed by Raj Narain and decided on June 12, 1975. So the Opposition began to join forces and planned a mass mobilisation campaign to demand the resignation of Mrs.Gandhi.

On June 26, 1975, Mrs.Gandhi moved decisively to put an end to all opposition to her continuance in office. At her request, the President of India declared an Emergency under Article 352 of the Constitution. The imposition of Emergency was justified on the grounds that economic reforms, essential for growth and social justice, were impossible to carry out within the limitations of the existing democratic process.

Considerable discontent began to develop as a consequence of specific acts of the Emergency regime. The most notable of such acts was the sterilisation programme of birth control introduced by Sanjay Gandhi, Mrs.Gandhi's son.
Discontent also began to develop against Sanjay Gandhi’s projects, like slum clearance and elimination of pavement squatters, which was accompanied by violent incidents.17

People found what Mrs.Gandhi stood for to be more frightening than the largely unknown policies of a relatively obscure Opposition.18 Due to lack of effective feedback on the policies, Mrs.Gandhi assumed that many of the policies adopted during the Emergency were popular: programmes to allocate housing sites to Harijans, redistribute land to the landless, abolish bonded labour, end or at least reduce rural indebtedness, and provide alternative housing for urban squatters. And while each of these measures had its detractors, the Government believed that, in the main, they were successful and popular. So Mrs.Gandhi decided to test her Government’s popularity by holding an election.

The 1977 elections brought the Janata Party to power. In this small interlude between 1977 and 1979 of Morarji Desai and Charan Singh’s Prime Ministership, India witnessed the style of collective leadership. This itself became the cause for the collapse of the Janata Government, and gave an impetus to have a strong leadership which could provide stability at the Centre, thereby legitimising the process of consolidation of power by Mrs.Gandhi, who again became Prime Minister in the 1980 General Elections to Parliament.
Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated in 1984, and the Congress came to power in 1985, with her son Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister, and an overwhelming majority in Parliament. Rajiv Gandhi occupied the central and most crucial position in the entire policy-making process. All major policies were either initiated by him or endorsed by him. There was a high level of centralisation of policy initiative and policy-making, and nearly all functionaries and institutions involved in policy-making had implicitly accepted the position by quietly submitting to it. The New Education Policy, approved by Parliament in the 1986 budget session, was the Prime Minister's handiwork and so was the policy of liberalisation of Governmental control over the economy.

V.P. Singh, who succeeded Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister in December 1989, formed a minority Government of the seven-party coalition known as National Front, with the support of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Left parties from outside. In such a situation, V.P. Singh's sudden announcement in the Parliament on the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report dealing with the reservation policy evoked very sharp reactions, particularly in the context of the decision being made by the Prime Minister without taking his Cabinet or other political parties into confidence. It was alleged that the decision was politically motivated and other parties in the Parliament opposed it vehemently.\textsuperscript{19}
Thus, it is evident that in a Parliamentary form of Government, if the Prime Minister, who commands a majority in the Parliament, is confident to carry a particular policy through, he can announce a decision either in Parliament or in public. This is not possible in a coalition Government with different ideologies and political views.

When the Central Government was formed by a single monolithic party, the Congress, it was more common for the Prime Minister to take and announce policy decisions. Thus, the Industrial Policy Resolutions of 1948 and 1956 were authored by Nehru who was the then Prime Minister. But even here, these were compromise documents, accommodating different interests and viewpoints. On the other hand, policy-making experiences constraint under a coalition, as in the case of the Janata Party rule which was a coalition in disguise. In a coalition, the chief executive does not occupy a commanding height and he is viewed more as a Chairman or primus inter pares. If the Prime Minister in a coalition takes policy decisions on his own which is not accepted by the other parties, then he is sure to lose support as happened in the case of V.P. Singh's National Front.

However, much depends upon the nature of the person, charisma and political skill of the Prime Minister. There is also a conflict between maintaining popularity and implementing
difficult policy decisions. Since leaders cannot implement many of their policies, and thus cannot count on policy success as a vehicle for assuring electoral support, they tend to centralize power in their person and utilize leadership appeals in electoral competition, as in the case of Indira Gandhi. This results in a gap between promise and performance in policy-making and implementation.

Institutions

The important institutions in India engaged in public policy formulation are discussed below:

1. Cabinet

The real executive is the Prime Minister and his Council of Ministers. The Council is a large body consisting of Deputy Ministers, Ministers of State and Cabinet Ministers and meets very rarely. In reality, it is the Cabinet, a smaller body consisting of the more senior members of the Council of Ministers, functioning on the principle of collective responsibility, which is the top policy-making body in Government, and ensuring accomplishment of desired tasks. Only members are entitled to attend the weekly meetings of the Cabinet, but Ministers of State, Chief Ministers, and technical experts may be invited to attend discussions of subjects with which they have special concern. Major issues are only referred to the Cabinet. Most matters are resolved within the
separate Ministries and departments, and the work of the Cabinet itself is handled largely by Committees. For details regarding cases that are brought before the Cabinet, refer Appendix-IX.

During Nehru's period, the Cabinet functioned in conformity with the basic norms of 'Prime Ministerial Government', where individual Cabinet Ministers had important political roles and some were persons with substantial political followings. For some time, Nehru though dominated, was not omnipotent because there were some Ministers such as Patel, Rajaji, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee who could talk to him on almost equal terms.

Nehru's Tibet Policy was opposed by Rajaji. Patel used to keep quiet in the Cabinet meetings but would talk privately to Nehru and on many occasions Nehru changed his decisions thereafter. But in foreign affairs particularly, Nehru did not want any interference of his Cabinet colleagues. However, his position in this respect underwent a slight change after the Chinese debacle which led to the Defence Minister V.K.Krishna Menon's exit from the Cabinet, much against the wishes of Nehru. But on the whole, Nehru dominated the Cabinet.

In Lal Bahadur Shastri's time, there was a greater freedom of discussion and decisions represented a genuine consensus. Nehru, many a time, kept his colleagues in the dark, while Shastri did not.
Mrs. Gandhi, with the authority of the office itself and her own charisma, augmented by considerable political skill, came to exercise enormous power, bringing the Cabinet into virtual eclipse as a source of policy influence. As power was centralised, it became more personal. The decision in 1975 to impose the Emergency was taken by Mrs. Gandhi without consulting the Cabinet. She concentrated all powers in her hands, and said: 'No country is governed by a Committee. There is always an individual at the helm of affairs, either a Prime Minister or a President or a monarch who is assisted by others. In India I am the Prime Minister and there is a Cabinet to help me'.

Morarji Desai of the Janata Party coalition, sometimes expressed views on important policy matters without consulting the Cabinet. E.g., Desai made a statement on nuclear energy policy, Sikkim, liberation of Goa and on Centre-State relations without consulting the Cabinet. However, Desai did not succeed in restoring the significance of the Cabinet as an institution. The divisions in his Government were too great, the collective responsibility of the Cabinet disintegrated in open warfare, and Desai himself had to resign in July 1979.

The pattern of Prime Ministerial dominance of a weak Cabinet was restored by Mrs. Gandhi after her electoral victory in 1980. Mrs. Gandhi came to rely heavily for both policy advice and political counsel upon her son, Sanjay Gandhi. After the death of her son Sanjay, she turned increasingly to her other son, Rajiv Gandhi.
Rajiv Gandhi continued his mother's pattern of consulting his own personal circle of advisers, irrespective of their position inside or outside the Cabinet.

2. Cabinet Committees

To relieve the Cabinet of some burden of work, Cabinet Committees have been set up. As a result, the Cabinet is left free to devote itself to more important matters. The Cabinet Committees can also include non-Cabinet Ministers.²⁵


Under Rule 6 of the Business Rules, the Prime Minister can add or reduce the number of such Committees or modify their functions. Each Standing Committee consists of such Ministers as specified by the Prime Minister. Ad hoc Committees of Ministers can also be appointed by the Cabinet or by the Prime Minister for investigating and reporting to the Cabinet on matters specified by the Cabinet. Any decision taken by a Standing or Ad hoc Committee can be reviewed by the Cabinet.
In Nehru's last years, the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet, set up in 1962 and composed of six senior Ministers including the Prime Minister, came to assume the role of an inner Cabinet and took over many of the decision-making responsibilities of the whole Cabinet.

Mrs. Gandhi had created the Political Affairs Committee, composed of a small group of senior Cabinet Ministers under her Chairmanship. Responsible for the coordination of major Cabinet concerns in domestic and international affairs and in defense, the Committee became the 'most important decision-making body in India after the Prime Minister herself.  

Thus, though the Cabinet is the highest policy-making body in the Government, some of the Cabinet Committees have come to exercise real authority and the Cabinet merely accepts the decisions already taken there.

3. Cabinet Secretariat

The Cabinet and the Cabinet Committees are provided secretarial assistance by the Cabinet Secretariat headed by the Cabinet Secretary. The Cabinet Secretariat prepares the agenda of the Cabinet meetings, provides information and material necessary for its deliberations, and draws up records of the discussions and decisions both of the Cabinet and its Committees. It also oversees the implementation of the necessary decisions by the Ministers concerned. It finalises
the rules of business and allocates the business of the
Government to the Ministries and departments under the
direction of the Prime Minister and with the approval of the
president.27

The Cabinet Secretary has, over the years assumed the
role of chief policy-maker at the administrative level through
effective reconciliation of interest and aggregation of overall
viewpoints of different departments.28 The interpersonal skills
of the incumbent and the confidence he evokes are two important
requirements of the job of the Cabinet Secretary.

When Morarji Desai became Prime Minister, the Cabinet
Secretariat with C.R.Krishnaswamy Rao Sahib as Cabinet
Secretary, played an influential role. Over time, the office of
the Cabinet Secretary had devalued, and the Prime Minister's
Office (PMO) has usurped much of its powers.29

4. Prime Minister's Office (PMO)

The Prime Minister's Office, known as the Prime
Minister's Secretariat till June 1977, came into existence in
August 1947. The PMO assists the Prime Minister in his public
activities and his functions as head of the Government. The
background and experience of the key personnel in the PMO is
not stated in a formal manner and the incumbents are appointed
in this office to essentially provide 'secretarial help' to the
Prime Minister. The staff tend to provide information links in
developing integrated policy perspectives. The work in the PMO concerns mainly with preparation of briefs, analysis of information, sifting of information obtained from a variety of sources and profiles of important matters relating to national and international aspects, and they advise the Prime Minister on matters of importance and follow-up issues as necessary.

Nehru had a good rapport with senior Secretaries and fully respected and used the institution of Cabinet Secretary. He did not need a very strong PMO. Lal Bahadur Shastri strengthened it considerably, and it emerged as a regular department under a full-fledged Secretary and its influence in top-level policy-making increased. Mrs. Gandhi raised it to rather dizzy heights of power and authority.

In the case of both Nehru and Shastri, the PMO was never associated with any political matter or activity. But unlike her father, Mrs. Gandhi had to establish herself as a leader of the party and also the Government. Naturally she had to use the Government to establish her position in the party. It was, therefore, inevitable that a very strong PMO emerged on the scene, on which she could depend for evolving new policies and then implementing them. Throughout the late 60s and early 70s, the PMO played a very major role in the affairs of the Government. P.N. Haksar, her Secretary, was a brilliant intellectual but a very sound tactician and administrator. The
implementation of the policies directly associated with the Prime Minister, such as bank nationalisation, the Bangladesh crisis management and the Twenty-Point Programme had each become the direct responsibility of the Prime Minister's Secretary. With the Emergency in 1975, the PMO became the symbol of the drive for an authoritarian set-up and the real extra-constitutional power centre. Those close to the Prime Minister and the family favourites began translating their personal opinions into policies and decisions through the PMO.

One of the earliest tasks of the Janata Government (1977-79) was to trim the PMO. Measures were taken to decentralise the power and authority concentrated in it during the preceding regime. It was a modest body, as it should be, and engaged itself in assisting the Prime Minister in his public activities. Though Mrs. Gandhi returned to power in 1980, this office did not reach its earlier heights.

When Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister in 1985, Mrs. Sarla Grewal became the Secretary to the Prime Minister, and the PMO slowly asserted itself. It was very active on the economic and External Affairs front as Rajiv Gandhi wanted to liberalize the economy. It also had to deal with defense matters as the Prime Minister was the Defence Minister. A large number of advisors were appointed to advise Rajiv Gandhi on various matters, in the process putting the regular machinery of the Government at a distance, and the PMO had become a body with awesome powers and influence.
PMO reached the lowest point in its working under Chandra Shekhar, as it could naturally reflect only the authority of a Prime Minister of a freak Government. Though the PMO started with a very low profile with P.V. Narasimha Rao, it indulged in political matters, and often interfered with the normal Governmental machinery.

5. Prime Minister's House (PMH)

Closely positioned to the PMO and many a time treated as a part of it is another institution, the Prime Minister's House (PMH). It usually consists of friends, relatives, politicians, business and industry people, ambitious bureaucrats, and the personal staff of the Prime Minister. Godmen appeared later on the scene, like Dhirendra Brahmachari with Indira Gandhi and Chandraswami with P.V. Narasimha Rao.

During Nehru's time, the PMH was a very low profile and almost non-existent institution. It was during Indira Gandhi's period as Prime Minister, that a PMH emerged. It was an irony that the PMH as symbolised by Sanjay Gandhi, came to overshadow the Prime Minister herself, whether she was in office or out. After Sanjay Gandhi's death, the importance of the PMH decreased considerably, but it still continued to be a force to be reckoned with.
During Rajiv Gandhi's time, the PMH came to overshadow the PMO. Under P.V. Narasimha Rao, the PMH was quite assertive, and a major portion of what should have been the PMH got visibly associated with and merged into the PMO, and the PMO was indulging in political matters.

The interplay between the Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues, the roles of Cabinet Secretariat and the PMO depend a great deal on the personal style of the Prime Minister and the political strength of the party in power and the balance of forces in the party system.

6. Planning Commission (PC)

India is a Welfare State, committed to improving the living standards of the people. To achieve this goal, India has adopted planning. Although an advisory body, the Planning Commission which was established in March 1950 has emerged as an important policy-making organ in the socio-economic development of the country, on a wide range of subjects, especially developmental, for both levels of Government, Centre as well as states.33

The terms of reference under which the Planning Commission functions include 'formulation of the Five Year Plans for the most effective and balanced utilisation of the country's resources' and 'working out of priorities in the plan', which delineates very clearly the policy-making functions of the Planning Commission. For further details on Planning Commission, refer Appendix-XI.
The Planning Commission works in consultation with the Central Government Ministries and departments as well as state Governments, and the Five Year Plan which it prepares after discussion and consultation with both the levels of Government becomes the national policy register of the Government, valid for a five year term.  

The Prime Minister is the Chairman of the Planning Commission. Besides the Prime Minister, four other Ministers, of Home, Finance, Defence and Human Resources are also part-time members of the Planning Commission. In addition, there is the Minister of Planning who is an ex-officio member. There are also full-time members.

The Planning Commission meets periodically to review the work and indicate policy guidelines. With the Prime Minister as Chairman, the Planning Commission assumes the power of a 'Super Cabinet' and intervenes in matters of policy as well as those of day-to-day administration. Though theoretically an advisory body, the Planning Commission, in effect, assumes the place of a virtual decision-maker in respect of the policies embodied in the Plans. E.g., the First Five-Year Plan had chapters on Food Policy, Land Policy, Industrial Development Policy, and Foreign Trade and Commerce Policy. The Planning Commission has also prepared papers on some individual policy matters. E.g., in December, 1966, it published a Committee
report on 'Industrial Planning and Licensing'. With regard to licensing policy, the report suggested raising of exception limits and the number of licenses to be given to a firm and revocation of unused licenses. The Planning Commission has also advised on other policy matters having a bearing on the current or ensuing Plan. E.g., the Capital Issues (Continuation of Control) Amendment Act, 1952, was passed in view of the strong recommendation of the Planning Commission.\textsuperscript{36}

7. National Development Council (NDC)

The National Development Council came into existence in August 1952 as a result of a Resolution issued from the Cabinet Secretariat. It is the apex policy-making organ of the country. It is composed of the Prime Minister, the Chief Ministers of all the states, and the members of the Planning Commission.

The terms of reference of the National Development Council expect it to 'review the working of the National Plan from time to time'. For further details about functions of the National Development Council, refer Appendix-XII. In practice, the National Development Council concerns itself with questions of social and economic policy and determines the parameters within which a technical plan can be framed and implemented. This reflects its role as a federal body providing a forum where the national and regional demands can be reconciled.
The National Development Council has laid stress on balanced development in different parts of the country and, to this end, it has favoured decentralised industrial production, setting up of suitable indicators of general development as well as continuous study of the problem of diminishing regional disparities. It has endorsed the imposition of betterment levy on areas benefited by irrigation projects, which is now the accepted policy of the country. Besides, the National Development Council is in general agreement with the policy of prohibition and has emphasised the need for framing a phased programme for its introduction. The National Development Council has favoured the introduction of Panchayati Raj at the District, block and village levels and has suggested that each state should so evolve its Panchayati Raj structure as to suit the particular conditions of the state. It has also expressed itself in favour of the policy of extending cooperative farms in the country and has even laid down broad principles for guiding the organisation of cooperative societies and the assistance to be given to them. It has also shown itself in favour of developing the cooperative movement to bring the distribution system under social control. This is only a cross-section of the varied problems that has received the attention of the National Development Council. In fact, all national problems ranging from East Pakistan to the national emergency are considered by this body.
8. **Secretariat**

The Secretariat of the Government of India is a collective noun, including Ministries and departments. Each of the Ministries and departments organised within the Central Secretariat is responsible for the execution of Government policy in a particular area and is headed by a Minister, who is the political head, and a Secretary, who is the permanent head.  

The word 'Secretariat' means the Secretary's office. The Secretary, being the principal adviser to the Minister, needs to be equipped with an office to assist him in the performance of his functions. Ministers come into power on the basis of broad programmes of action promised to the electorate. These broad programmes need to be provided with content and shape in order to be made workable. This apart, Ministers have got to finalise policies on various emerging problems not quite anticipated in the party manifesto. As policies can be framed only on the basis of adequate data, precedents and other relevant information, the Secretariat makes these available to the Minister, thus enabling him to formulate policies.

The Secretariat has a transitory cadre of officers operating on the tenure system. Technically speaking, the Government of India does not possess a permanent civil service of its own, except the Central Secretariat Service. It has always been the official policy to fill the middle and higher
management level positions at the Secretariat by deputation of officers from the state Governments as well as from the various Central Services, controlled as they are by their respective departments, the only exceptions being the External Affairs, Railways and Posts and Telegraphs Ministries. This staffing arrangement is necessary because higher civil servants engaged in policy-making and advising Ministers must possess first-hand as well as fresh experience of working in the field to keep the actions and decisions of the Central Government as close to reality and as meaningful to the people as possible. For further details on functions of the Secretariat, refer Appendix-XIII.

Finally, as S.R. Maheshwari has observed, 'The identification of major policy-making organs in the Government is not a sure proof of their compulsory involvement in the exercise .... Sponsoring is itself critically important: if the Prime Minister or his Office proposes a policy, it may not be thoroughly discussed in all the units on this network and in the process some organs may even get completely bypassed, their consent having been assumed.'

Bureaucracy

The term 'bureaucracy' denotes civil servants occupying varying positions in public administration and through which the Government seeks to formulate and implement public
policies. M.de Gourney, a French economist, used the word bureaucracy for the first time, during the first half of the eighteenth century. However, Max Weber was the first social scientist who made a systematic study of bureaucracy and its characteristics.\textsuperscript{39}

Weber described the 'ideal' bureaucracy as a highly rationalized, legalistic kind of authority and structure controlled at the top by a small group of decision-makers whose policies were dutifully implemented by subordinate administrators whose obedience to commands should be prompt, automatic, and unquestioning.\textsuperscript{40}

The public policy-making roles of the political executive and the Government bureaucracy are highly integrated. In a Parliamentary democracy, the political executive is responsible to the legislature, and ultimately to the people, and lays down policies in the light of the mandate received by it from the people, as also its political philosophy. The job of the bureaucrat is two-fold -- one, he has to tender advice while the policies are framed and present the alternatives with the pros and cons, leaving the final decision to the political executive and, two, to attend to the execution or implementation of public policies.\textsuperscript{41}
Policy in traditional terms involves politics, and therefore, it is argued that it should be the concern of the Ministers alone, and the civil servants should only have the responsibility for its execution in a dispassionate and detached manner. An early generation of progressive reformers like Woodrow Wilson, Frank Goodnow, and Luther Gulick emphasised the sharp distinction between the spheres of politics and administration.

However, a major breakthrough occurred in 1949, when Paul H. Appleby published his book 'Policy and Administration', in which he challenged the older concept that politics and administration are two separate and distinct activities. He wrote, 'Administrators also participate in the making of policy for the future; they formulate recommendations for legislation, and this is a part of the function of policy-making.

Kenneth Kernaghan claims that, 'In the course of interpreting, clarifying and applying policy, public servants may significantly influence the success of policy decisions taken by Ministers and legislators. The accuracy and enthusiasm with which public servants administer policy determines to a large extent the success of that policy .... It is clear that administration has important implications for policy and that politics cannot be easily separated from administration.'
The bureaucracy is supposed to be the 'expert' group with the necessary educational, technological and other relevant embellishments to provide the real knowhow for policy-making. When politicians accept the advice of the bureaucrats, then the impact of expertise is felt. The bestowal of discretionary power by politicians in the hands of the bureaucrats to implement policy decisions has resulted in the increase of bureaucratic power. Consequently, the actual content of the policy, in some instances, becomes entirely a matter of bureaucratic determination.

As regards the role of the Indian bureaucracy in public policy-making, it has to be noted that the British, who ruled India for almost a century, established the Indian Civil Service (ICS), a system of bureaucracy, to run the colonial administration in India. The conceptual foundation of the ICS was in principle based on the Weberian model of a bureaucratic organisation. Primarily devised for the maintenance of law and order and collection of revenues, it was a Government by civil servants, who were not responsible to the people over whom they ruled.

However, with the attainment of Independence in 1947, the total environment and ethos of the country underwent a qualitative change. Elections, political parties, competitive politics, Parliament and Ministers came on the scene. With the
adoption of planning, the nature of governmental tasks in post-
Independence India shifted from mere maintenance of law and
order to social welfare and individual progress. A suitable
administrative arrangement was called for to plan and implement
the developmental tasks. The Indian Administrative Service
(IAS) was created, and came to co-exist with the ICS. Today the
IAS is the core of the country's administrative structure,
sharing its tasks with a number of All-India, Central and
State services.

The bureaucratic model will have to be necessarily
different from the Weberian model when it is entrusted with a
total societal transformation. The Weberian model of
bureaucracy emphasises the neutrality and anonymity of the
civil service. Neutral attitude on the part of civil servants
who have to formulate development policies, define the goals of
development tasks and implement them in an effective manner, is
not possible as they have to interact with people and the
political leadership at every stage in the developmental
process. Bureaucracy has to be 'committed' to the principles in
the Constitution and to the attainment of socio-economic
justice. Of course, care should be taken to ensure that a
'commitment' does not degenerate into 'compliance', and produce
instability in the political system.48
By and large, political parties in India conform to the Constitution in regard to the fulfilment of their policies. However, the question arises as to what kind of a commitment is expected of a civil servant with regard to party policies. Since the Constitution leaves the door open to a variety of choices, each political party looks at public welfare from its own point of view.49

The controversy over the commitment of civil servants had arisen in India when the former Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi, at a meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party on November 16, 1969, said that the country would fall into a rut if it followed the British system in which civil servants were not concerned about the ideology of the political party in power. In other words, she wanted the public services to be politically committed. However, in her subsequent speech at the Institution of Engineers on February 9, 1970, she modified her earlier stand and said, 'We need Government servants with 'commitment' -- to the development of the country and personal involvement in the tasks'. She emphatically denied that she wanted politically committed or servile Government employees, but felt they should be committed to the objectives of the State -- which has been approved by Parliament. They should have faith in the programmes they execute.
Thus, the idea of bureaucracy as a neutral instrument in the conduct of public affairs stands refuted. In short, the bureaucracy is being politicised. There is a dichotomy between a depoliticised and a politicised bureaucracy. A depoliticised bureaucracy is trained to adopt a neutral posture in relation to the ruling parties. The concept of political neutrality of the civil service suggests that the civil servant implements the policies of the political party in power (which forms the Government) faithfully without regard to his personal convictions. On the other hand, the concept of a politicised bureaucracy means the bureaucratic promotion of special interests of a political party at the expense of national objectives.

Today, political influences tend to pervade every nook and corner of the national life and the administration is inevitably drawn into it. Administrators encounter frequent interference by politicians. The relations between the political executive and the civil servant in India have rapidly deteriorated. In this connection, the Administrative Reforms Commission commented, 'There is a disinclination among quite a number of Ministers to welcome frank and impartial advice from the Secretary or his aide and an inclination to judge him by his willingness to do what they wish him to do..... A further development of this unhealthy trend is the emergence of personal affiliations leading to an element of
'politicalisation' among the civil servants. All these cut at the root of the healthy relationship between the Minister and the civil servants'. The politicisation of bureaucracy depends upon the extent to which bureaucrats succumb to undesirable pressures from politicians.

The civil servants play a decisive role in the determination and execution of policies. If the political executive is intelligent, assertive, energetic and pushing, he will have his imprint on the determination of the policies, and bureaucrats to that extent will have lesser roles to play. However, if the political executive is inexperienced or if he does not have a strong political backing, then the role of the bureaucrats will be more prominent.

When Nehru was the Prime Minister, civil servants only had a secondary role. He decided policies, both foreign and domestic, and civil servants carried them out. Even the proceedings of the Cabinet were dictated by him.

This position changed when Shastri became the Prime Minister. In the first three months alone, his Secretary L.K.Jha drafted a major letter from Shastri to the Chief Ministers on the food crisis, his Address to Parliament, his statement on the need to reorient Indian planning with greater emphasis on agriculture. Shastri organised a Committee of Secretaries of key Government departments to advise him, and the Cabinet generally rubber-stamped decisions of this body.
When Mrs. Gandhi became Prime Minister, her trust of the Congress Party elite declined after the 1967 elections, and as she shifted leftward, especially after 1969, her reliance upon the civil service increased. During the Emergency in 1975, the bureaucracy became the privileged agent for the implementation of Government policy, and was concerned with tasks such as implementing agrarian reforms, the Twenty Point Programme, family planning drive, and so forth. A peculiar situation had developed for the bureaucratic structure under Mrs. Gandhi's regime. The bureaucracy had enjoyed vast powers, but it had to submit to Mrs. Gandhi without question and accept her dictation. Thus, the bureaucrats were subjected to enormous political pressures during the Emergency; most acquiesced to whatever orders came down from above; some were overzealous in their exercise of new found power.

The Report of the Shah Commission of Inquiry appointed to look into the excesses of the Emergency noted, 'A large number of officers obediently carried out the instructions emanating from politicians and administrative heads, issued on personal and political considerations'. The reasons for this submission was that there was an all-pervading fear of consequences.
The impact of this system on the bureaucracy was considerable. The number of bureaucrats who were dissatisfied and demoralised by it was far greater than of those who sought and received personal benefits for loyal service.

The centralised and 'committed' system of bureaucracy was dismantled by the Janata Government led by Morarji Desai. The first reaction with bureaucracy was that of relief at restoration of normalcy in its arrangements. The bureaucracy found a new opportunity to assert itself. The Janata Ministers were so well and ably managed by the entrenched bureaucracy that they had come to wholly rely on their respective secretariats and go by the advice which the latter tendered. However, the Janata Government, too, came out with a variant of the doctrine of a committed bureaucracy. The Cabinet Secretary of the day, M.Mukharji, in a letter, urged the senior officials to familiarise themselves with the political philosophy of the new ruling party and give up an over-reliance on precedents.

During the last months of the Janata Government and under the caretaker Government of Charan Singh, the bureaucracy provided continuity in administration and stability in a period of political crisis.

Following the change of political power back to the Congress in 1980, Mrs.Gandhi, in part to restore morale, but primarily to further centralize executive authority, began to
deal directly with the highest echelons of the bureaucracy. The Secretaries of each Ministry came to play increasingly important policy-making roles and were linked to the Prime Minister through the Prime Minister's Office.\textsuperscript{57}

Under Rajiv Gandhi, much of the policy-making power was centralised in the person of the Prime Minister. Senior-level appointments, both political and bureaucratic, thus reflected Rajiv Gandhi's personal preferences. The morale of the bureaucracy was shattered when Rajiv Gandhi, while addressing a press conference, casually announced the removal of the Foreign Secretary, A.P. Venkateswaran, from office. This aroused the gravest misgivings about the future pattern of Government in New Delhi.\textsuperscript{58}

Thus, in some cases, the bureaucrat, sensing the weakness of the political boss, acquires a dominant say in policy-making. In other cases, the bureaucrat becomes a willing tool in the hands of politicians. Ultimately, a satisfactory policy process will be possible only if the political executive and the bureaucracy augment one another's diverse strengths and share a mutual appreciation for their separate perspectives.
END NOTES


