

CHAPTER – 1

ORGANISATIONAL SET UP FOR REDRESS OF PUBLIC GRIEVANCES IN GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances is the chief coordinating agency for redress of public grievances arising from the work of Ministries/Departments and other Organizations of Government of India. According to the allocation of Business Rules 1961 the main functions of the Department in the sphere of redress of public grievances are as follows:

Policy and coordination of issues relating to:

- (i) Redress of Public Grievances in general, and
- (ii) Grievances pertaining to Central Government Agencies

The role of co-ordination consists mainly in laying down broad policy guidelines for the institutionalization of grievance redress system in each organization. The Department is thus not engaged in the substantive redress of grievances, which arises out of the working of innumerable agencies of the Government organizations through out the country. Since most grievances arise at field level, their actual redress has necessarily to come from agencies functioning at the local level which are fully conversant with the subject matter of grievances related to their respective field of activity.

The grievances received in the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances are, therefore, forwarded after scrutiny to the Ministries and Department concerned and other organizations of Government for appropriate action. However, considering serious nature of grievances certain grievances are taken up by this Department for close monitoring until their final disposal by the Departments concerned.

The present organizational set up for redress of public grievances in Government of India is as follows:

(i) Internal Grievances Redress Machinery within each Ministry/Department

The Internal Grievances Redress Machinery is now in existence in most of the Ministries and Departments of Government of India. An officer of the rank of Joint Secretary is designated as Director of Public Grievances who is vested with the powers to call for files/papers relating to public grievances in cases in which a decision is pending for more than three months and take a decision with the approval of Secretary/head of the Department of the Ministry/Department concerned, even though the matter is not within his normal scope of duties.

The Ministries/Departments are also observing Wednesdays as meeting less days when Directors of Public Grievances are available from 10.00 hrs in their rooms to hear and receive grievances of the citizens.

(ii) External Grievances Redress Machinery in the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances

The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, in its capacity as the nodal agency for matters relating to public grievances, acts as an external monitoring agency and reviews periodically the performance of Ministries and Departments with respect to redress of public grievances. The Grievances received in the Department are gone through and are sent to the Ministry/Department concerned for appropriate action. The complainant is also informed about the name and address of the officer and the Ministry/Department where the complaint has been forwarded for action. Even in cases where the petition does not contain a grievance and no action is warranted by this Department, a reply is sent to the petitioner. Meetings are held with Directors of Public Grievances/Staff Grievances Officers in which actions taken by the Ministries/Departments for strengthening of the Grievance Redress Machinery is discussed. The volume of grievances received in the Ministries and Departments and disposal thereof, is

also monitored through the quarterly reports submitted by the Ministries and Department to the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances. The Department also carries out periodic evaluation of grievances redress machinery set up in selected Ministries/Departments having large public interface. In the process of dealing with public grievances, the Department also identifies the systematic deficiencies and takes up studies of grievances prone areas with a view to recommend measures to eliminate causes of grievances.

The Public Grievances Division of the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances serves as the Secretariat of the Core Group of Secretaries headed by the Cabinet Secretary to review grievance redress mechanism of different Ministries and Departments of Government of India.

Though the grievances of the public are received at various points in the Government of India, there are designated nodal agencies in the government apart from the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, for handling of public grievances. These are as follows: -

- (1) The Public Wing of the Prime Minister's Office.
- (2) The Directorate of Public Grievances, Cabinet Secretariat and
- (3) The Department of Pensions and Pensioners' Welfare, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.

The Public Wing of the Prime Minister's Office

The Public Wing of the PMO receives a large number of petitions which are given the name of public grievances though their nature varies from case to case. The petitions include requests for financial, medical aid, job placements, messages for various functions, suggestions for improving governance, etc. and grievances also. The petitions are properly segregated in the PMO and forwarded to the Ministries/Departments concerned for necessary action. A few cases which deserve closer attention are pursued by the PMO, once again with the Ministry/Department concerned.

The Directorate of Public Grievances, Cabinet Secretariat

Based on a review of the machinery for redress of public grievances in the Government of India made in 1987, the Government, *inter-alia*, decided to set up a new organization in the form of the Directorate of Public Grievances in the Cabinet secretariat. Accordingly, the Directorate of Public Grievances came into being with effect from 1 April, 1988 with four Departments, which were more prone to public complaints, in its jurisdiction. Subsequently, some more Departments were added to the purview of the directorate. The Directorate is now looking into the grievances relating to 14 Departments/Organisations as follows:-

1. Ministry of Railways and its undertakings;
2. Departments of Posts;
3. Department of Telecommunications, including Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd. (MTNL) and Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd;
4. Banking Division of the Department of Economic Affairs, including Public Sector Banks;
5. Insurance Division and national Savings Scheme Division of the Department of Economic Affairs, including Public Sector Insurance Companies viz LIC, GIC and their subsidiaries;
6. Ministry of Urban Affairs including DDA, CPWD and Directorate of Estates;
7. Ministry of Surface Transport and its undertakings;
8. Ministry of Civil Aviation including Airport Authority, Indian Airlines and Air India;
9. Regional Passport Authority under the Ministry of External Affairs;

10. Employees Provident Fund Organisations under the Ministry of Labour;
11. Central Government Health Scheme under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare;
12. Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) Hospitals and Dispensaries directly managed by ESIC under the Ministry of Labour;
13. Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas; and
14. Department of Education (Ministry of Human Resource Development) which covers Central Universities and Kendriya Vidyalayas;

The Government Resolution dated 25 March, 1988; setting up the directorate contains the following important provisions:

- (i) It will take up complaints after fully satisfying itself about the bonafides of the complaints and keeping in view the gravity of the subject matter of the grievance. In other words, the Directorate was envisaged as an Appellate Body investigating grievances selectively and particularly those where a complainant has failed to get redress at the hands of the internal machinery and the hierarchical authorities.
- (ii) The Directorate has authority to call for relevant files/papers from the Ministries/Departments concerned with a view to examining whether the grievance has been dealt with in a fair, objective and just manner and whether a decision containing reasons has been communicated to the complainant within a reasonable time. Under the existing instructions, reports/files called for by the Directorate from the Ministries are required to be furnished by them within a period of six weeks.
- (iii) Where the Directorate is satisfied that the grievance has not been dealt with in a fair, just and objective manner, it makes suitable recommendations for consideration and adoption by the concerned Ministries/Departments. The recommendations made by the Directorate are required to be implemented within a period of one month.
- (iv) The Directorate does not concern itself with policy matters or where a grievance has already been disposed of at the level of Minister. It also does not entertain grievances relating to service matters (excluding those relating to payment of terminal benefits like gratuity, provident fund, etc.), commercial contracts or cases which are subjudice or where quasi-judicial procedures are prescribed for decision making.

The Directorate is expected to act as an appellate body investigating only selected grievances. The main responsibility in the sphere of redress of public grievances continues to be with the internal machinery set up in the various Ministries/Organisations. The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances continues to function as the nodal agency for issue of policy guidelines and instructions for strengthening the internal machinery in the government Departments.

The Department of Pensions and Pensioners' Welfare

The Department of Pensions and Pensioners' Welfare, being a policy formulation agency for all matters pertaining to pensions and retirement benefits of government officials, handles all grievances pertaining to their retirement benefits. All grievances received, except VIP references, are transferred to the Ministry/Department concerned for setting the grievance since the payment of pensions and retirement dues is de-centralized. The Department takes up only those cases wherein any policy issue is involved.