**[Killing neutrality](https://www.dawn.com/news/1424854/killing-neutrality)**

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INDIA’S civil service has been under severe strain since the Congress party split in 1969 and the factions furiously fought to grab power. That was when the concept of a ‘committed civil service’ was propounded and enforced. Now, nearly half a century later, a determined effort is being made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to suborn the independence and integrity of the civil service.

On June 11, newspapers astonished their readers by carrying advertisements inviting applications from “talented and motivated Indian nationals” to apply for posts of the rank of joint secretary in the government of India — ‘motivated’ being code for ‘committed to the ideological programme and policies of the BJP’. Areas of expertise were named “revenue, financial services, economic affairs, agriculture, road transport, shipping, environment and forest, civil aviation and commerce”. The applicants will not have to go through the grind at the Administrative Staff College at Mussoorie. The impact of this on the morale and independence of the civil service can well be imagined.

*Sinister moves are being made to subvert India’s civil service.*

More followed. On July 15, newspapers reported an even more sinister move. It bears quotation in extenso. “The Narendra Modi government has decided to field the top babus of various ministries and government departments to counter the opposition’s criticism over lack of adequate job creation over the four years since it was voted to power. The secretaries of various ministries have been asked to write articles that will provide detailed overview regarding employment opportunities created by the government in their particular sector through concrete statistics. These articles will appear in a special edition of the government’s publication, Yojna, to mark this year’s Independence Day. ... The articles by babus — essentially a sector-wise compilation of the number of jobs created during the four years of PM Modi’s government — are expected to be widely quoted by the BJP during campaigning for the forthcoming assembly polls in several states and Lok Sabha polls in 2019.”

In short, civil servants paid by the taxpayers will be required to act as public relations officers of the party momentarily in power. This is a gross violation of the constitution, the integrity of the civil service and the fundamentals of its role in a democracy governed by the rule of law. The civil service must be politically neutral. Make it a part of the ruling party’s propaganda machine and the entire democratic system collapses.

As Vallabhbhai Patel wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru on April 27, 1948: “I need hardly emphasise that an efficient, disciplined and contented service, assured of its prospect as a result of diligent and honest work, is a sine qua non of sound administration under a democratic regime even more than under an authoritarian rule. The service must be above party and we should ensure that political considerations, either in its recruitment or in its discipline and control, are reduced to the minimum, if not eliminated altogether.”

He was brutally frank. The civil service is necessary to hold the country together. “The union will go — you will not have a united India, if you have not a good all-India service which has the independence to speak out its mind, which has a sense of security that you will stand by your word and that after all there is the parliament, of which we can be proud, where their rights and privileges are secure. … If you do not adopt this course, then do not follow the present constitution. Substitute something else. ... [W]hatever you like but not this constitution. This constitution is meant to be worked by a ring of service which will keep the country intact.”

A distinguished civil servant, B.K. Nehru, proposed an effective reform. “The powers of promotion, suspension and transfer, which are the powers now used to bend the civil servant to the minister’s will, must be exercised, not by the political executive, but by a group of senior civil servants themselves. As we are no respecters of any convention, this result will have to be achieved by law. ... This is the system that today prevails in the Indian defence services and is the main reason why they have still, unlike the other public services, retained their discipline and their efficiency.”

The constitution-makers consciously adopted a ‘British type of constitution’, as Patel declared in the Constituent Assembly on June 7, 1947. There the posting, transfer, and promotion of, and disciplinary action against, a civil servant is decided by the head of the civil service department, who also holds the post of cabinet secretary, in consultation with senior permanent secretaries.

Britain’s Civil Service Code, 2006, says: “You must not act in a way that is determined by party political considerations, or use official resources for party political purposes.” Modi’s latest fiat flouts this basic rule.

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