

# State of Bangladesh Civil Service Management (2009–2012): The Role of the Media

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## Abstract

The Awami League (AL)-led Grand Alliance came to power with a 'Charter for Change' in 2009 in order to ensure good governance in Bangladesh. From 2009 to 2012, the government has taken various steps to make the civil service efficient and capable. This article strives to explore what the AL government has done to manage the civil service during 2009–12. The article analyses newspaper articles on the AL government's actions on recruitment, promotion, and transfer. It also analyses the role of the media in exposing the state of the civil service management by conducting structured interviews of purposively sampled respondents. The article shows that the AL-led government has manoeuvred the civil service through partisan decisions on recruitment, promotion and transfer, which have left the civil service management in disarray.

## Keywords

Awami League, Bangladesh, bureaucracy, civil service, civil service management, politicisation, role of media

## Introduction

The civil service of a country includes all the permanent functionaries of a government, excluding the defence services (Wahab 2009). Since independence, successive governments in Bangladesh have relied entirely on the civil services to implement both policies and political manifestos (Zafarullah and Khan 2001).

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Thus, it is very important to manage the civil service so that the government can fulfil its agenda with due care. In order to manage the civil service for the fulfilment of desired goals, the proper practice of recruitment, promotion and transfer is pertinent. Bright and energetic human resources constitute the most important component of the bureaucracy. However, 'faulty recruitment, promotion and transfer may create a vicious cycle: fewer interested, meritorious candidates enter the civil service; with fewer meritorious new entrants, the scope for politicisation increases; and this further deters the most able candidates from entering the civil service' (Jahan 2006, 2). To increase efficiency of service delivery and general administration of the government, the present ruling party—the Awami League (AL)—included some agendas in their manifesto before the elections in December 2008. It is worth analysing how the AL government has performed while managing the civil services on the issues of recruitment, promotion and transfer of civil bureaucrats because these three are the most important tasks in human resource management (Berman et al. 2009; Hays, Kearney and Cogburn 2009).

This article outlines the state of Bangladesh's civil service during the period 2009–12, as seen through the eyes of the media. In terms of objective, the article focuses on the news reported by leading daily newspapers of Bangladesh, namely, *The Daily Star*, *The Daily Jugantor*, *The New Age*, *The Daily Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Independent*. The study seeks to recognise the role of media in exposing the state of the civil service in Bangladesh. It also describes the situation of the civil service under the government led by the AL.

## Methodology

A quantitative and qualitative approach was followed in the research for this article. A structured interview was opted as qualitative data collection technique and this qualitative data is presented and analysed in a quantitative manner (Abeyasekera 2002; Babbie 2010). In order to triangulate the research (Kalof, Dan and Dietz 2008), we have scrutinised the news on recruitment, promotion and transfer reported by the selected five national newspapers. The sample population for the structured interview included editors of those five national daily newspapers and 10 Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) officers posted in the Ministry of Public Administration (MOPA). Among those 10 respondents, there were two additional secretaries, two joint secretaries, four deputy secretaries and two senior assistant secretaries. MOPA is the lead agency vested with the responsibility for looking after and managing the human resource aspects of BCS. By interviewing the editors of these newspapers, we tried to find out the sources of the reports on the civil service, thus providing us with the possibility to cross-check of validity of the news. Through the interviews, we tried to explore the situation regarding recruitment, promotion and transfer of BCS officers and staff working in different capacities. We further triangulated this research by presenting and matching the data collected from the interviews with the news reported in these five newspapers in a quantitative manner. This triangulation also helped us to find how accurate the media has been in depicting the state of civil service management in Bangladesh.

## Civil Service Management in Bangladesh

The civil service in Bangladesh has two tiers—the central secretariat, which consists of ministries/divisions and the lower tier is the attached departments/directorates and field level offices of the general administration. The first tier is responsible for making policies and managing the affairs of the entire civil service. The lowest tier is responsible for delivering services to citizens and implementing the policies and directions made by the top tier (Jahan 2006; Khan and Zafarullah 2005; Kim and Monem 2009). At present, there are 61 ministries plus divisions and 351 departments and directorates in Bangladesh (Bangladesh National Portal)<sup>1</sup>. The management of the civil service is a crucial issue for the government that is usually dealt by government functionaries and statutory bodies. A distinctive aspect of the civil service structure is organisation of the civil servants into semi-functional cadres. Subsequent to the completion of the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination selection process, recruits are assigned to an occupational cadre by the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC) on the basis of performance, vacancies, quota compulsion and preference of candidates. Usually, a civil servant remains a member of his originally chosen/assigned cadre throughout his/her career. His/her job type, promotional prospect, and duties are determined to a large extent by association with his/her cadre.

Currently there are 28 cadres in the BCS. The Judicial cadre selection and recruitment process is no more under the traditional BPSC because as by notification dated November 1, 2007, the government separated judiciary from executive upon a judgment of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh to give effect of article 22<sup>2</sup> of the constitution of Bangladesh. The cadre officers are the Class I Gazetted officers of the republic. But all the Class I officers are not gazetted officers. All gazetted officers are Class I officers (Karim 2008; Khan and Zafarullah 2005; Zafarullah and Khan 2001). MOPA (formerly Ministry of Establishment) is the apex body responsible for administration of the affairs of civil service management that includes recruitment, promotion, transfer and training, of the civil servants which is now more than a million as far as the number is concerned (see Table 1). Table 1 shows the number of people working in four different classes in three different organisations in government

**Table 1.** Class-wise Strength of Civil Servants (December 2008)

Class	MIN/DIV		DEPT/DTE		AUTO/CORP		TOTAL	
	EXIST	VACANT	EXIST	VACANT	EXIST	VACANT	EXIST	VACANT
II	2,146	459	48,845	14,467	44,968	13,258	95,959	28,184
II	1,931	458	20,811	8,752	25,745	12,693	48,487	21,903
III	2,318	666	609,927	92,410	87,765	20,467	700,010	113,543
IV	2,316	361	137,822	31,952	63,411	20,816	203,549	53,129
Total	8,711	1,944	817,405	147,581	221,889	67,234	1,048,005	216,759

**Source:** MOPA (2008).

**Notes:** MIN = Ministries; DIV = Divisions; DEPT = Departments; DTE = Directorates; AUTO = Autonomous Bodies; CORP = Corporations; SANC = Sanctioned; EXIST = Existing

administration. From this Table, it is quite clear that more people are employed in Class III and Class IV than Class I and Class II. Hasan (2010) notes:

Usually all the HR activity for individual cadre has been done by the fundamental ministry. For example, a Tax cadre or economy cadre officer joined their fundamental ministry i.e. Ministry of Finance or Ministry of Planning. After joining the service all HR operational matters are controlled by the respective ministry or directorate under the guidance of the ministry. All the HR functions of the BCS (Administration) cadre officers along with the secretariat management are run by the MOPA.

Individual ministries deal with the overall management of non-cadre officers. That means, neither BPSC nor MOPA has the responsibility of recruiting, promoting and transferring Class III and Class IV staffs.

### *Recruitment in the Civil Service*

The President promulgated the BCS Rules on 1 January 1981 by exercising his power contained in Article 133 of the Constitution and after consultation with the BPSC. The rules contained the procedure for recruitment, appointment by direct recruitment, appointment by promotion, probation and confirmation (Khan 2013). The Constitution adopted in Bangladesh in 1972 stated the broad aims that were intended to govern the recruitment and selection to the public service. It stated 'there shall be equality of opportunity for all the citizens in respect of employment of office in the service of the republic' and 'no citizen shall on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth be ineligible for, or discriminated against, in respect of any employment or office' (Article 1, 4th Schedule) (Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh 2010). This ensures the establishment of quota system in the BCS examinations. There is a severe debate on this present quota system as only 45 per cent of total vacancies are reserved for merit. Freedom Fighters, Women, District, General and Tribal are the categories of quota in recruitment. This quota is also upheld during the recruitment of Class III and Class IV staffs (Khan 1998, 2012). BPSC is responsible for recruiting Class I cadre and non-cadre officers. It has syllabus for both general and technical cadres and a rigorous screening process to select finally the best person for the service. Class II staffs are recruited by the concerned ministries according to the human resource needs but there are provisions that BPSC can recruit Class II non-cadre officers through examination.

### *Promotion of Civil Servants*

Promotion in the cadre civil service, on paper, is based on merit but seniority is given 'due consideration'. Promotion to deputy secretaries, joint secretaries and additional secretaries is based on merit plus seniority formula. Sixty per cent weightage is given on any 10 years of a candidate's Annual Confidential Report (ACR) and 40 per cent weightage is placed on the interview. In the interview,

both seniority and performance are considered. Serious doubts have been raised as to the validity of the ACR and interview as mechanisms to meaningfully judge a candidate's potential and suitability for promotion is not maintained very often.

### *Transfer*

Generally there are no specific rules or procedure on the transfer of civil servants. Usually, cadre officers are transferred from one office to another after every three years. The situation in the area of transfer shows a trend of uncertainty and lack of trust among civil servants and ministers.

### **Exposure of Civil Service Management: The Role of Media**

Media is a means of conveying a specific kind of information—a message—about any product, service or issue (Katz 1995, 1). Media seeks to rectify the actions taken by the government and ensure accountability towards the citizens by presenting news on the three important administrative issues of recruitment, promotion and transfer and other administrative malpractices. Besley et al. (2002) argue that the media can play a vital role if it is totally free from state control. They noted further that correct information given by media is correlated with state penetration and freedom of press. Putting full confidence on The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2009, Iftekharuzzaman (2010) thinks that this act has allowed pervasive freedom of expression with lesser state penetration into media and has allowed the press in ensuring transparency and accountability through strict scrutiny of the civil administration.

There is political approach to the study of press regulation in Bangladesh. The political approach comes from the liberal concepts of democracy where the media, especially the print media, plays the role of watchdog for making the government accountable, especially on issues regarding recruitment, selection and transfer in civil service. Media in Bangladesh helps to promote public awareness and promotes transparency as it disseminates the deeds of the government (Anam 2002). As a component of the media, newspapers are a reliable system and medium through which change can be brought in the society and information is made comprehensible to the readers. 'Newspapers are systems of interconnected networks, created through networks' (Witherspoon and Sylvie 2002, 15). Fourie (2001) sees newspaper as portrayals of the real image of society and government and various issues in state affairs with more elaboration and analysis. He also notes that newspaper or print media is more accessible by every chunk of a society. This implies that the national dailies under scrutiny of this study empowered by the RTI Act 2009 have a proper platform to express what they see in the government's move regarding the management of civil service.

## State of Civil Service Management (2009–12): What Does the Media Portray to Us?

### Recruitment

The present government was hit hard by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) mutiny in the late February 2009. For this reason, the AL government was not able to give attention to the civil administration. Thus, first significant move from the government to recruit people in the civil service was observed in April 2009 as the post for the Deputy Director in the Fisheries Department was filled up by a contractual recruitment (*The Daily Jugantor* 2009b). The person who was given the contract was very close to the ruling party. During the last part of 2009, the government gave a contractual recruitment for the post of Chairman of Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB); this was another decision made based on political affiliation of the recruited person (*The Daily Star* 2009a). Based on the screening of five newspapers, it was found that 16 contractual recruitments were made in 2009 (see Table 2).

The government also expressed intention during the last part of 2009 to recruit 4,133 doctors for boosting the health service (Zannat 2009). The people of Bangladesh, especially those who badly needed health care from public-funded hospitals, warmly welcomed this decision. Despite having a huge backlog in publishing the results (Hasan 2010), BPSC published the 28th BCS examination where the Commission recommended 2,190 candidates for different cadres according to the need placed by MOPA. To fill up 207,000 posts in Class III & IV category, the government tried to conduct recruitment but unfortunately most of

**Table 2.** Recruitment, Promotion and Transfer (2009)

Month	Recruitment	Promotion	Transfer/OSD
January	0	106	37/12
February	15	427	111/5
March	0	10	165/7
April	1	3	83/5
May	0	0	53/0
June	0	1,388 (education cadre)	0
July	0	0	10/5
August	0	40	31/4
September	0	503	46/11
October	0	18	32/4
November	0	1	0
December	0	1	56/3
Total	16	2,497	624/56

**Sources:** *The Daily Star* (2009) and *The Daily Jugantor* (2009).

**Table 3.** Causes of Backlog in the Recruitment Process of Class III and Class IV Staff

Causes	Number of Respondents		Total
	Editors	BCS Officers	
Procedural Problem	–	0	
Lack of Applicant	–	0	
Political Pressure	5	8	13
Bureaucratic Corruption	–	2	2
Total	5	10	15

**Source:** Interview conducted by the authors (MOPA, Dhaka, 2013).

the recruitment process was postponed due to political interference and ‘Tadbir’ (Jahangir 2010). On this issue most of the respondents expressed the same views (see Table 3). Eight out of 10 respondents, who are BCS officers posted in MOPA, think that there is an acute need for Class III and IV staff but political pressure has just halted the process.

This would definitely jolt the field of administration as the cadre officers suffer from being under-staffed. The data shows that political pressure or interference has affected civil service recruitment very badly. Newspaper reports and responses from interviewed BCS officers tell us that the civil service has been managed in the same manner, which further highlights how the media has reported on the reality of the BCS to the people efficiently and authentically. In the latter half of 2010, about 150 personnel were recruited in a newly formed Karnaphuli Gas Distribution Company Ltd (KGDCL) as per the recommendations of the local MP, Ministry & Chairman of Parliamentary Committee. It shows the extent of political interference in the recruitment process.

By doubling viva marks (previously 100 and now 200), the government opened the door to manipulating the BCS examination in 2010 (Acharjee 2010). In the early months of 2011, the BPSC recommended for two separate Public Service Commissions to be set up—one for the general cadre and the other for the technical cadre. If implemented, people would have witnessed a speedy recruitment policy (*The Independent* 2011). Two more contractual recruitments were observed in 2011, along with regular recruitment based on 29th BCS examination results. This implies that BPSC has been trying to speed the process and also develop a good recruitment system. The media portrays that BPSC has been committed to augment the BCS examination and recruitment process during the last three years and the respondents also expressed a similar kind of view while answering questions on the recent role of BPSC in making a faster and credible recruitment system for BCS (see Table 4).

Table 4 shows that most of the respondents held similar views. This implies a consistency and credibility in the news reported in the newspapers during the last three years. The BPSC was vocal about simplifying the quota system. They urged for greater emphasis on merit for recruitment. In their annual report of 2011, the BPSC advocated abolishing the district quota system to provide more chances to female candidates. BPSC also pushed for a system through which they could

**Table 4.** Working of the BPSC

Response on Whether the BPSC is Willing to Produce an Efficient, Faster and Credible Recruitment Process	Number of Respondents		Total
	Editors	BCS Officers	
Yes	4	7	11
No	1	3	4
Total	5	10	15

**Source:** Interview conducted by the authors (MOPA, Dhaka, 2013).

accommodate more tribal people in the civil service (Chakma 2012; *The New Age* 2012). This means that the BPSC has been trying to improve the civil service management since the present government assumed power. In January 2012, one of the ministers said in the parliament that the government would recruit about 0.3 million people in vacant posts in the civil service (*The Independent* 2012b). At the same time, the government is trying to legislate a new ‘Government Servant Bill’ instead of the previously proposed ‘Civil Service Act’ to contract out the public service; hence ensuring a way through which private sector employees come into the civil service on a contractual basis. The government has already recruited 270 people on a contractual basis since 2009 (Ahmed 2012a; Rahman 2012a). These two instances clearly state that the government is confused and is trying to contradict its own decisions as it says that it will recruit 0.3 million people straight into the civil service while making room for contractual recruitments.

### Promotion

The first of any big reshuffle was observed when seven Additional Secretaries were promoted to Secretaries. They all were loyal to the party in power and were deprived of promotions in the last Four-Party Alliance government (*The Daily Jugantor* 2009d). In the month of February 2009, again, about 80 Deputy Secretaries who were considered to be loyal to the party in power were promoted to Joint Secretaries (*The Daily Jugantor* 2009c). Promotions have been made without considering the BCS Recruitment Rules of 1981. This has brought about huge dissatisfaction among officers from different batches (*The Daily Jugantor* 2009a). Officers promoted on the basis of political affiliations and patron–client relationship is a regular scenario in the management of civil service (Kochenak 1993). Table 5 shows the response of respondents regarding this issue.

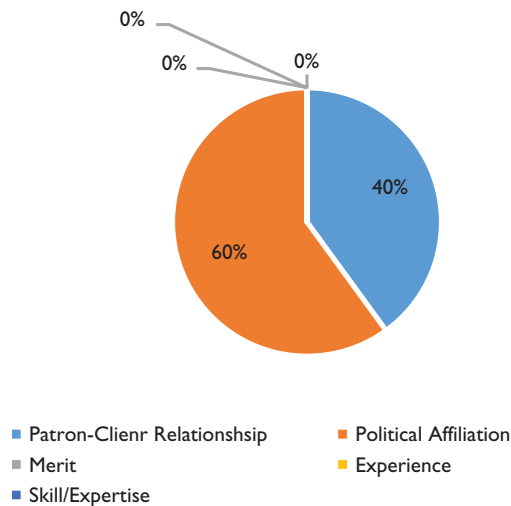
The data presented in Figure 1 and Table 5 shows that the promotion of officers based on political affiliation is the issue that is put forward by both the media and BCS officers. The government tried to strengthen its grip over the BCS by promoting 2,497 officers right after it assumed power in January 2009 (see Table 2). There were many officers left out of promotion lists, presumably because these officers had been patronised during the BNP-led government. The wholesale promotion in 2009 hampered the work of the Secretariat as the



**Table 5.** Criteria for Promotion of BCS Officers and Staff

Causes	Number of Respondents		Total
	Editors	BCS Officers	
Merit	0	0	0
Experience	0	1	1
Skill/Expertise	0	1	1
Political Affiliation	3	6	9
Patron-client relationship	2	2	4
Total	5	10	15

**Source:** Interview conducted by the authors (MOPA, Dhaka, 2013).



**Figure 1.** Criteria for Promotion of BCS Officers and Staff

**Source:** Interview conducted by the authors (MOPA, Dhaka, 2013).

promoted officers could not get assignments or offices (*The Daily Star* 2009b). Having witnessed the promotion of 2,497 officers in 2009, the BCS (Administration) cadre of the 11th, 13th and 15th batches demanded their own promotions; hence leading to chaos within the civil service (*The Daily Star* 2010). A total of 605 officers from different cadre were promoted during the end of 2010. Not surprisingly, most of them were promoted with a total disregard for seniority and merit. Although the government tried to establish a system of promotions, it gave 649 promotions (Islam 2012a; *The Independent* 2012a). This has been the largest promotion offered by the AL government, which was questioned by many (see Table 6).

This wholesale promotion created a very unusual situation in which newly promoted officers could not join higher posts due to unavailability of positions.

**Table 6.** Promotions Made by the Government (2011–12)

Sources	Number of Promotions (2011)	Number of Promotions (2012)	Total	Match between Two Sources
The five national news papers	181	649	830	100%
MOPA computer cell	181	649	830	100%

**Source:** Authors' own work.

The increase in the retirement age also did not help in vacating posts for the newly promoted officers. As a result, promoted officers had to stay at lower-ranked posts. This agitated several of the promoted officers (Ahmed 2012b, 2012c). Conflict and tension between technical and BCS (Administration) cadres was visible as the technical cadre officers formed an association earlier that year to stop discrimination against them (Rahman 2012b). The AL government made one positive move in 2009; it raised the status of Officer in Charge (OC) of a police station from Class II to non-cadre Class I. Many of the police officers and staff considered this to be a good move to motivate police inspectors and to bring discipline in the process of law enforcement as the cadre civil servants would not undermine the police inspectors any more (Islam 2012b).

## Transfer

Transfer of officers is one of the weapons the present and previous governments have wielded in order to alienate officers who are politically close to the opposition party. During 2009–12, the AL government reshuffled many officers regardless of rank and merit to strengthen their grip on the civil service (*The Daily Jugantor* 2009; *The Daily Star* 2012). Officer on Special Duty (OSD) is a form of transfer that is equal to the punishment of a civil servant. The media has reported this quite often. Most of the BCS officers who were selected as sample respondents also confirmed that the OSD has been used as one of the prime weapons to manage the BCS (see Table 7).

**Table 7.** Scenario of BCS Officers' Transfer (Mode and Reason)

Mode	% of Respondents	Reason	% of Respondents
OSD	75	Efficient service delivery	
Regular shuffle	15	Motivate officers	10
Deputation	5	Employee development	
Project responsibilities	5	Control the bureaucracy	90
Total	100		

**Source:** Interview conducted by the authors (MOPA, Dhaka, 2013).

Table 7 shows that 90 per cent of the respondents felt that officers had been transferred only to continue the strong hold of the political government over the civil service and the OSD has been a common way of dealing with the transfer issue. Media reports show that the OSD system has been abused by the present AL government as they have sent 382 OSD from different ranks including senior assistant secretary, deputy secretary, joint secretary, additional secretary and secretary. From 2009 to 2012, these officers have suffered, as neither do they have work, nor an office. This is also very costly for the government in terms of finances. Most of these officers had been patronised by the previous BNP-led government (Ahmed 2012c). This shows the political motive of the AL government in managing the civil services. However, this reshuffling and transferring of officers was seen positively, as many senior bureaucrats said that the ‘shake-up was done professionally’, when the government transferred 17 secretaries in different capacities (*The Daily Star* 2010).

## Findings and Conclusion

The AL government has made many attempts to manage the civil services. Among those, the efforts in recruitment, promotion and transfer show that the government used these three avenues for achieving their political ends. This raised many questions from scholars and retired civil servants. The state of the Bangladesh civil service during this period includes politicised recruitment (contractual), promotion and transfer (see Table 8). Merit and proper system of promotion and transfer of officers to maintain discipline within the civil service has been ignored. Political interference in Class III and IV recruitment process hampered the entire field administration as the field administration and implementing bodies could not recruit people according to their needs. However, the apex recruitment body of the BPSC has paid due attention to improve the system of recruitment so that political interference in recruitment can be eradicated forever.

As the analysed data shows, the condition of civil service management has been well portrayed by the media. There is a harmony between the responses

**Table 8.** State of Civil Service Management (2009–12)

Year	Promotion (N)	Recruitment (N)	Transfer (N)
2009	2,497	16	680
2010	683	5,066	955
2011	181	1,726	417
2012*	649	**	37
Total			

**Source:** Authors’ own work based on reports of five daily newspapers.

**Notes:** \* Data up to September 2012.

\*\* Data not available.

of respondents and the news reported in the newspapers. The people at large have been well informed on what the government has done behind the doors. They have questioned many serving bureaucrats on the issue of civil service management. By questioning them, very often the media tried to hold the government accountable for its actions. By arranging seminars (*The Independent* arranged one on 'Civil Service Reform') and workshops on civil service management, the media disseminated the pros and cons of civil service management during this period. Not only are the people well informed about the situation within the civil service, the information can also help guide them during future elections.

The media has therefore helped in upholding democracy within Bangladesh. Another significant aspect that has been identified from the analysis of the data is that the media collected information about the civil service from MOPA. It is for this reason that the data published in reports and articles was seen as authentic. During the interview, one deputy secretary of MOPA in charge of a cell that stores all information about promotion, recruitment and transfer said: 'the reports you usually get from the newspapers on civil service management are entirely based on the information which we give to them either through press meets or on informal demand'. This proves the accuracy of the media in depicting the state of civil service management. We can therefore assume that the BCS officers themselves use the media as their voice because due to service rules and restrictions, they are not entitled to comment and argue on civil service management issues in any kind of public forum. Hence, the media has been playing a crucial role in circulating what the BCS officers feel about the present state of civil service management as well.

It is very disappointing for Bangladesh that civil service management is not practiced based on the basis of rules and neutral decisions. It is now necessary for the country to have a specific 'Civil Service Law' to constrain the government from using the civil services for its own benefits. The role the media has played during this period is important and laudatory. It has also raised demands for laws that stop political interference in the civil services. Finally, in order to prosper, Bangladesh has to have a civil service management that follows rules, regulation and rational decisions rather than political interference and bureaucratic politics.

## Note

1. The National Web Portal of Bangladesh is the single window for all government information and services initiated by the government. Available at: <http://bangladesh.gov.bd/> (accessed on 01/09/2016).
2. Article 22 of the constitution of Bangladesh: "The State shall ensure separation of the judiciary from the executive organs of the State".

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