



## EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

**GENERAL STUDIES 2 & 4: GOVERNANCE/ ETHICS**  
**TOPIC: BUREAUCRATS**

**DATE: 24.12.2024**

### INDIA'S 'STEEL FRAME' DOES NEED A CHECK

#### India's Governance Challenges and the Need for Bureaucratic Reforms

##### Introduction: India's Dual Governance Reality

- **Economic Growth vs. Administrative Challenges:**  
India's economic narrative showcases significant progress in innovation, GDP growth, and infrastructure. However, this progress coexists with entrenched governance challenges like income inequality, underinvestment in essential sectors, and bureaucratic inefficiency.
- **Central Role of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS):**  
The IAS, India's premier bureaucratic cadre, has historically been at the helm of governance. Yet, systemic issues within the IAS structure demand urgent reforms to unlock India's full potential.

##### Legacy and Challenges of the IAS

##### Historical Context and Role:

- The IAS evolved from the colonial Indian Civil Service (ICS) and became the backbone of India's administrative framework after Independence.
- IAS officers occupy key decision-making roles, contributing to governance at both state and central levels.

##### Key Challenges:

##### Politicisation:

- Frequent transfers, suspensions, and promotions are often dictated by political loyalty instead of merit.
- This undermines morale and professionalism, creating an environment where officers hesitate to take bold, policy-driven decisions.

##### Lack of Specialisation:

- Officers frequently rotate between departments, limiting opportunities to gain domain expertise in areas such as health, education, or finance.
- The lack of specialisation hampers effective policymaking in an increasingly complex administrative landscape.



## Corruption and Inefficiency:

- Governance quality is moderate, as reflected in World Bank rankings for government effectiveness.
- Inefficiency and red tape result in poor policy implementation, impacting public services and economic growth.

## Centralisation of Decision-Making:

- While centralised governance under the executive has expedited reforms, it often sidelines bureaucratic inputs, limiting the effectiveness of policy execution.
- Bureaucratic autonomy is further undermined by over-reliance on decision-making from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

## Government Efforts and Reforms

### 1. Initiatives by the Modi Government:

- Steps to limit politically motivated transfers and introduce measures to ensure accountability.
- Critics, however, caution against excessive centralisation, which risks further disempowering the IAS.

### 2. Lateral Entry Initiative:

- **Purpose:** Introduce specialists from diverse sectors into senior bureaucratic roles to improve governance outcomes.

- **Implementation:**

- Initiated in 2018, this initiative has seen the recruitment of 57 professionals with domain expertise by 2023.
- The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) recently advertised 45 positions for Joint Secretaries and Directors across ministries.

- **Impact:**

- Diversified bureaucratic leadership, reducing IAS dominance in central policymaking roles.
- Only 33% of Joint Secretaries at the Centre now belong to the IAS, compared to near-total dominance a decade ago.

- **Challenges:**

- Resistance from civil servants fearing morale issues and distortion of promotion incentives.



- Concerns from opposition parties about the lack of reservation provisions for marginalised groups.
- Political pressures recently led to a government rollback on lateral entry appointments, highlighting the contentious nature of these reforms.

## Recommendations from Administrative Reform Commissions

- **Key Commissions:**

- Over 50 commissions and committees since Independence have proposed administrative reforms to modernise the bureaucracy.
- Notable among these are:

1. **First Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), 1966:**

- Advocated for greater accountability, specialisation, and merit-based promotions.

2. **Second ARC, 2005:**

- Recommended:
  - Lowering the age for civil services entry.
  - Implementing performance-based promotions.
  - Introducing lateral entry to bring external expertise.
  - Protecting bureaucrats from politically motivated transfers.

- **Implementation Gaps:**

- Most recommendations remain unimplemented due to bureaucratic inertia, political resistance, and entrenched institutional practices.

## International Models for Reform

- **U.S. Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE):**

- Proposed under U.S. President-elect Donald Trump to streamline governance by eliminating redundancy and inefficiency.
- **Key Features:**
  - Focus on reducing wasteful expenditure, promoting accountability, and leveraging private sector expertise.



- **Relevance to India:**

- India could adopt a similar advisory body to identify inefficiencies, ensure data-driven decision-making, and assess bureaucratic performance.
- A time-bound commission with clear objectives could ensure reforms remain actionable and results-oriented.

## Challenges to Bureaucratic Reform

### 1. Resistance from Within:

- Seniority-based progression and the generalist approach are deeply institutionalised, limiting acceptance of reforms like lateral entry and performance-based promotions.

### 2. Political Interference:

- Reform proposals, such as the Civil Services Standards, Performance, and Accountability Bill (2010), have stalled due to lack of political consensus.

### 3. Judicial Interventions:

- Despite Supreme Court directives to establish civil services boards (2013), enforcement remains weak.

## Way Forward: A Holistic Approach to Reform

### 1. Merit-Based Recruitment:

- Emphasise domain expertise during recruitment to ensure officers possess the skills required for specific governance roles.

### 2. Performance-Linked Promotions:

- Replace seniority-based progression with promotions tied to measurable outcomes and impact.

### 3. Safeguards Against Political Interference:

- Enact laws to protect bureaucrats from arbitrary transfers and undue political influence.

### 4. Encourage Specialisation:

- Provide opportunities for officers to develop deep expertise in specific policy domains, such as healthcare or infrastructure.

### 5. Lateral Entry:



# PL RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

MAKING YOU SERVE THE NATION

- Institutionalise lateral entry with transparent selection processes and provisions for diversity, including reservations.

## 6. Invest in Data Infrastructure:

- Build robust systems to monitor bureaucratic performance, track efficiency, and guide informed policymaking decisions.

## Conclusion

- Modernising India's bureaucracy is critical to meeting its governance and economic aspirations. A reformed IAS, complemented by lateral entry and performance-oriented practices, can serve as a robust engine for India's development. By addressing systemic inefficiencies and fostering accountability, India can ensure governance effectively serves its people while driving its growth story forward.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indias-steel-frame-does-need-a-check/article69020104.ece>

