

Autonomous Bodies

Why in news?

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The Committee for Review of Autonomous Bodies (ABs) is chaired by Ratan Watal and the committee's interim report has not yet made public.

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What is an autonomous body?

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- An Autonomous Body (AB) is set up by the government for a **specific purpose**.

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- It is **independent in day-to-day functioning**, but the government has some control over ABs.

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- The government funds ABs in some way — revenue expenditure, capital expenditure, or both.

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- Several ABs are supposed to provide content that can feed into India's soft power aspirations.

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What is the history of ABs?

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- Today, there are at least 679 ABs. Of the 679 ABs, half were set up between 1984 and 1989.

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- In 1955, there were only 35 ABs.

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- The oldest is '**The Asiatic Society**', established in 1784 by William Jones.
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- In those days, their objectives were laudable and they didn't look to the government for money.
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- The Asiatic Society started taking recourse to government funding in 1984, when it became an institution of national importance.
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- Even as late as the 1960s, they only asked for land and sought financial assistance for constructing buildings.
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What did the Bimal Jalan Committee say?

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- Ministry shall put in place a system of external or peer **review of autonomous organisations every 3 - 5 years** depending on the size and nature of activity.
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- Such a review should be the responsibility of the concerned administrative division of the ministry and should focus on the following:
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- the **objective** for which the autonomous organisation was set up and whether these objectives have been or are being achieved;
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- **whether the activities should be continued** at all, either because they are no longer relevant or have been completed or if there has been a substantial failure in achievement of objectives;
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- whether the nature of the activities is such that these need to be performed only by an autonomous organisation;
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- whether similar functions are also being undertaken by other organisations, and if so, whether there is **scope for merging or winding up** the organisations under review;
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- whether user charges, wherever the output or benefit of services are utilised, are levied at appropriate rates; and
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- the scope for maximising internal resources generation so that the dependence upon government budgetary support is minimised.
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- Since public resources are involved, and all resources have trade-offs, questions must be raised regarding **transparency, accountability and culpability of ABs.**

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Source: The Indian Express

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