

Lateral entry - Not The Right Option

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- The NITI Aayog has recently recommended that “lateral entry” from the private sector should be introduced in the civil services.

\n

- The PMO is reportedly considering the matter seriously.

\n

- However, despite the benefits of domain knowledge, the existing generalist nature holds the potential to continue as a system.

\n

\n\n

What are the concerns in civil services?

\n\n

\n

- Independence is an essential condition for effectiveness of bureaucracy.

\n

- Unfortunately, the deteriorating quality of political executive has robbed the bureaucracy of its independence and freedom to “speak out its advice”.

\n

- Political governments have used postings, transfers, re-employment, charge sheets, and of late tickets to elections to influence bureaucrats.

\n

- The government, instead of addressing these problems, is opting for a quick fix which will further erode the efficiency of the IAS.

\n

- Notably, the most touted domain knowledge and lateral entry is said to do little to address the present concerns in civil services.

\n

\n\n

Why should the present system continue?

\n\n

\n

- A rising complaint is that the IAS is lacking domain knowledge in a fast-evolving, technology-driven world.

\n

- But a deeper look into the demands reveals that domain knowledge may not be the right choice to handle challenges in civil services.

\n

- **Role** - Technology intersects with the development needs of the common people, which can vary from village to village.

\n

- Clearly, there can be no one size fits all solutions, no matter how good the technology is.

\n

- Thus, the civil servant's role here is that of a synthesiser i.e. to assimilate a technology or idea, adapt it to the local context, and then implement it.

\n

- One has to be qualified to coordinate the functioning that works through several ministries at the Centre and in the states.

\n

- E.g. construction of a dam - a lateral entrant would regard this a job for a domain (engineering) expert.

\n

- On the other hand, a civil servant's role involves in issues with acquisition of land, resettlement and rehabilitation, environmental and social impact assessments, financial planning, negotiating PPPs, etc.

\n

- Starkly, the limited, one-dimensional vision that technocrats have would make them unsuitable for this role.

\n

- **Grass-roots experience** - The first 10 years that an IAS officer spends in "the field", exposes her to the dynamics of the actual workings of the government.

\n

- This is an invaluable input to serve the demands, future in the career at policy-making level.

\n

- An IAS officer is uniquely qualified for this unlike a lateral entry recruit who would completely lack grass root knowledge.

\n

- **Representation** - The "domain knowledge" is understood to be technically qualified people from outside.

\n

- Notably, in recent years there is an increasing percentage of candidates from engineering and medicine backgrounds into the IAS.

\n

- This gives the service, representations from technical backgrounds, to be made use of, if and when required.

\n

\n\n

What is the way ahead?

\n\n

\n

- An IAS officer is clearly a domain expert in the most difficult and complex of all domains - the public administration.

\n

- As, this involves policies, demographics, politics, social imperatives, religion, law and order, etc.

\n

- A lateral entrant from the private sector is highly doubtful of getting a balanced role in handling all these.

\n

- Lateral entry would also be a regressive move towards the spoils system, giving the government the freedom to appoint loyalists, favourites and ideological compatibles.

\n

- The government should thus address the concerns only by vesting more independence with the civil services.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: New Indian Express

\n

