Autonomous Bodies

Why in news?

\n\n

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

\n\n

What is an autonomous body?

\n\n

\n
- An Autonomous Body (AB) is set up by the government for a **specific purpose.**
\n
- It is **independent in day-to-day functioning,** but the government has some control over ABs.
\n
- The government funds ABs in some way — revenue expenditure, capital expenditure, or both.
\n
- Several ABs are supposed to provide content that can feed into India's soft power aspirations.
\n

\n\n

What is the history of ABs?

\n\n

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

\n\n

\n
- In 1955, there were only 35 ABs.
\n

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

\n\n

What did the Bimal Jalan Committee say?

\n\n

\n
- 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.
\n
- Such a review should be the responsibility of the concerned administrative division of the ministry and should focus on the following:
\n
- the **objective** for which the autonomous organisation was set up and whether these objectives have been or are being achieved;
\n
- **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;
\n
- whether the nature of the activities is such that these need to be performed only by an autonomous organisation;
\n
- 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;
\n
- whether user charges, wherever the output or benefit of services are utilised, are levied at appropriate rates; and
\n
- the scope for maximising internal resources generation so that the dependence upon government budgetary support is minimised.
\n

- Since public resources are involved, and all resources have trade-offs, questions must be raised regarding **transparency, accountability and culpability of ABs.**
  \n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Indian Express

\n

