Dealing with the Civil Services

The Central government’s recent decision to compulsorily retire two Indian Police Service (IPS) officers and one Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer for ‘non-performance’ is bold and laudable.

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Compulsory retirements:

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- The compulsory retirements are in pursuance of the service rules that contemplate a review either **when an officer reaches the age of 50 or completes 25 years of service**.
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- We need to uphold the basic democratic principle of a healthy executive control over the civil service, and actions like these, undertaken clinically and without malice, are a sine qua non if we want to enhance the currently poor standards of public administration.
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Do the services provide any perks?

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- The public should know that our All India Services and the Central Services are paid well by Indian standards. Each Pay Commission has enlarged the civil service pay packet and perquisites.
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- After passing the Union Public Service Commission examination, the system takes care of the person.
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How well the system checks its officers?

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- Only around 10 per cent of officers remain current in their knowledge and exert themselves to keep the administrative system in shape.
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- The malady of non-performance arises from the fact that not all positions in governments at the Centre and in the States are meaningful.
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- We have a bloated bureaucracy, and portfolios are created only to accommodate officers. As a result, many officers do not have more than a few hours of work a day.
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- A product of this is sluggishness, and a long spell of inactivity leads to loss of initiative and a desire to be productive.
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- Except for a few dedicated officers, both in the higher echelons and in the lower rungs, it is a sad fact that ordinary citizens mostly cannot get through to any senior member of the bureaucracy, either in person or over the telephone, to express their grievances.
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- The IPS, IAS and the Indian Forest Service (IFS) each have their own sizeable number of dishonest officers.
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- The tragedy is that many officers, early in their careers, fall into the trap and never retrace their paths
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How the virtues can be infused?

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- The failure to show the right way to those getting into the services is of supervisory officers and not of the much-maligned politician who may be guilty of other misdeeds.
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- If a District Collector or a District Superintendent of Police is himself not a model of efficiency and honesty, the trainee Assistant Collector or Assistant Superintendent of Police cannot go elsewhere to learn the virtues of hard work and probity.
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- If the system is functioning and has not collapsed, it is because we still have a handful of outstanding men and women in the higher bureaucracy, who are motivated by a spirit of service and have the conviction that they will be models to young officers.

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- It is in this context that all of us should plead for an incessant drive against the sluggish persons in government services.
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What is the obstacle for civil services reforms?

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- The only obstacle in the way of drastic civil service reform is the judiciary that overturns or stays every administrative action against an erring senior officer.
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- Courts would earn the admiration of a harassed public if they stopped interfering in disciplinary matters once they are satisfied that prescribed procedures had been followed in a case coming up before them and there is no malice writ large on a decision.
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- **Judicial overstepping**, while correcting unjust action against a few honest civil servants, unwittingly promotes the cause of many unscrupulous elements.
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- The track record of administrative tribunals in the country is a matter of great concern to those looking for a balanced and objective bureaucracy.
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- There is need here for an immediate corrective by the Union Law Ministry.
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