Indian Bureaucracy

> ***Syllabus***:*GS IV – Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude.*
>
> *Civil/Public Service Values and Ethics in Public Administration*

Why in news?

Recent article on the conflict between democracy and fair administration highlights the issues on bureaucracy Integrity in India.

What is bureaucracy?

- **Bureaucracy** – It refers to a system of administration characterised by complex rules, hierarchical structures, and formal procedures.
- **Definition** – Max Weber defined it as the *only legal-rational authority* to exercise the state's legitimate power.
- **Role in administration –** It is the core of any public administration.
- It helps to realize the dream of true democracy and *bridge the gap between the people and their representatives*.
- **In India** – Though *colonial in origin*, it was deeply Indian in ethos and spirit.
- Its importance becomes even more pronounced in India, the world's largest functioning democracy with the largest population.
- Independent India's bureaucracy is an institution to which the common citizen looks up.

What constitutes Indian Bureaucracy?

- It consists of officers working under the Central and All India Civil Services and the State Civil Services.
- **Top bureaucrats** – Among the Central and All India Services, the highest-ranking officers form the most elite group under the Central Government of India.
    - Indian Administrative Service (IAS),
    - Indian Police Service (IPS)
    - Indian Revenue Service (IRS), and others.
- Each of these services plays a specific role in India's public administration.
- Among them, the IAS occupies a unique role, as its officers are preferred for senior positions in government at both the state and central levels.
- **State-level Bureaucracy** – Officers of the State Civil Services are selected by individual states.
- They work entirely under the state government and different services like
    - State Administrative Service (SAS)

    - State Police Service
    - State Revenue Service.
- Among them, the SAS, much like the IAS, occupies key positions within the state-level administration.

What are the strengths and weakness of bureaucracy in India?

*Bureaucrats are referred to as the **steel frame of India** by Sardar Patel, bureaucrats are responsible for implementing government policies and making decisions.*

Strengths of Indian bureaucracy
• **Provide continuity in governance and administration** – It ensures that policies and programs initiated by one government are carried forward by the next. • **Deliver efficient governance** – It provides a *professional and experienced cadre* of administrators who are well-trained in various aspects of governance, such as policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. • **Check on the power of elected officials** – It ensures that decisions are made *based on merit* and not political considerations. • **Ethical bureaucracy** – Ethical leaders are considered honest, caring, and principled individuals who make *balanced and fair decisions.* • Such ethical and conscious leadership can promote integrity within institutions. • **Prioritise public welfare** - In the Covid times when everyone feared death, these brave officers *set aside their personal lives*, responsibilities and fears to serve the nation, with some even laying down their lives.
Weakness of Indian Bureaucracy
• **Lack of accountability & transparency** – *Opacity in governance* and lack of accountability leads to culture of impunity where civil servants can get away with poor performance or even corruption without fear of consequences. • **Sluggish administration** – It include *delays in justice and bureaucratic red tape*, with high-profile cases dragging on for years due to inefficiencies. • **Abuse of power** – Incidents such as *extrajudicial killings, custodial deaths*, and police inaction in politically sensitive cases raise serious concerns about fairness in administration. • **Erosion of trust** – *Corruption, bureaucratic apathy* during disasters, and undue political influence over decision-making further erode trust. • There are also concerns about *favouritism and cronyism*. • **Bureaucratic culture of hierarchy & seniority** – They can *stifle innovation* and discourage younger civil servants from taking risks.

What lies ahead?

- **Strengthening public trust** – It can be done by increased transparency and accountability in governance.
- **Reforming police** – Reforms can be taken to transform policing into a service-oriented institution.
- **Making People-centric services** – For instance, the khaki should symbolize unimpeachable integrity in thoughts, words, and deeds.
- **Embody ethical leadership** – Encouraging bureaucrats to develop ethical behaviour as a defining personality trait and to have an ethical consideration in public life.

Every great institution is the lengthened shadow of a single man. His character determines the character of the organization. Only then can fair administration and democracy go hand in hand - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Reference

[The Indian Express| Bureaucracy and Fair Administration]