Lateral Entry in Civil Services

Why in news?

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Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT) has been asked to prepare a proposition on lateral entries into civil services that deal with economy and infrastructure.

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Was the idea mooted before?

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- The first Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) had pointed out the need for specialization as far back as in 1965.
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- The **Surinder Nath Committee** and the **Hota Committee** followed suit in 2003 and 2004, respectively.
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- In 2005, the second ARC recommended an institutionalized, transparent process for lateral entry at both the Central and state levels.
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- But pushback from bureaucrats, serving and retired, and the sheer institutional inertia of civil services that have existed largely unchanged for decades have prevented progress.
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What is the need for lateral entry?

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- The newly independent India had pressing concerns about the need for socioeconomic development, the demands of Central planning and the imperative of holding together a new nation.
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- Thus, at that time, the civil services were seen as a tool for achieving these

objectives.
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- But, seven decades later, those **dynamics have changed.**
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- A judicious combination of domain knowledge and relevant expertise is a critical requirement in governance.
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- It is felt by many that these attributes are often not present in a cadre of generalists.
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- The second ARC also envisaged a **shift from a career-based approach to a postion-based approach** for the top tier of government jobs.
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- Also, given the sheer enormity of most government projects, **good managerial talent** is critical.
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- ARC felt that civil servants ought to compete with domain experts from outside the regular civil service for senior positions.
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What might be the negatives?

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- Large-scale lateral induction would amount to a **vote of no-confidence in the government personnel management system.**
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- It is also not clear how lateral entrants would be more performance-oriented and less process-compliant than the civil service, considering that process compliance is the prerequisite.
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- The proposal for lateral entry at senior decision-making levels will increase the disconnect between policymaking and implementation.
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- Also, the best talent can be attracted only if there is reasonable assurance of reaching top level managerial positions.
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- Lastly, lateral entry would **open the gates for a spoils system**, drive talented people away from a civil service career.
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Source: Live Mint & Business Standard

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