

Lateral Entry into the Civil Services

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- Recently, the government has proposed lateral entry into the civil services.
- While there are multiple concerns, the idea is neither completely new nor an anathema not should be discarded.

\n

\n\n

What is current status of the proposed lateral entry program?

\n\n

\n

- **Actions** - The central government recently sent out a notification seeking applications to fill in 10 government posts at the “Joint Secretary” level.
- This caused anxiety among the bureaucratic ranks, and a retired bureaucrat even filed a writ against it in the Supreme Court.
- While the bureaucracy clearly feels that its turf is being violated, the response from applicants has been overwhelming.
- **Perceptions** - Some consider this as the beginning of the end of “neutral and impartial” civil services as loyalists are likely to be inducted into the services.
- This might also lead to “privatisation of the IAS” as private business houses might succeed in planting their people to influence government policies.
- But a considerable number of people also think that this is a bold decision to bring in fresh talent, and that it should be given a fair trial.

\n

\n\n

What is the strongest argument in support of lateral entry?

\n\n

\n

- Higher bureaucracy in the secretariat often has to examine proposals received from specialised departments/corporations.
- Further, consultations with other ministries/departments are to be made in order to present a report to the concerned minister for his final decision.
- Thus, a Joint Secretary to the government has the crucial function of giving implementable shape to abstract policy ideas.
- This is a complex consultative process requiring experience and expertise for which detailed procedures have been formulated.
- This complexity is what forms the nucleus of the debate on lateral entry.
- The proponents of lateral entry argue that domain specialists as against generalist career bureaucrats fit the bill better.

\n

\n\n

What are views of those who oppose lateral entry?

\n\n

\n

- An IAS officer, after years of experience at the field level, does indeed become an expert in public systems on his own right.
- Further, merely being an expert doctor doesn't equip one enough to advice on how health policy of the nation should be formulated.
- **Alternatives** - Rather than lateral entry, it has been suggested to try short term courses for IAS officers to better their domain knowledge during service.
- Graded training programs could be designed according to governance demands, and the personal interests and aptitude of existing bureaucrats.
- Ideas have also been advanced for IAS officers to gain work experience and knowledge in diverse domains, which are worth considering.
- **Introspection** - The bureaucracy needs to introspect on why some officers have become subservient to the political classes despite their stature.

\n

- Notably, this trend continues even after retirement, as multiple lucrative post retirement options have opened up high profile government officials.
- \n

\n\n

Is our government machinery bereft of experts presently?

\n\n

- \n
- Specialists like engineers, doctors, agricultural scientists, lawyers have always had a substantial say in the decision-making and implementation.
- \n
- Besides, Secretaries to the Departments of Atomic Energy, Science & Technology, Scientific and Industrial Research, Health Research, and Agricultural Research have always been scientists of eminence.
- \n
- Similarly, in departments like the Railways, Posts, etc., all senior positions are manned by Indian Railway or Postal Service officers.
- \n
- Therefore, there is nothing very original in the new initiative other than the fact that it has been proposed for a Joint Secretary level entry.
- \n

\n\n

What is the way ahead?

\n\n

- \n
- As the number of such lateral entrants increases with time, there is a likelihood of the larger bureaucracy becoming politically biased.
- \n
- This fear could have been allayed if the government considers letting the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) handle the recruitment process.
- \n
- The government should merely define the job requirements explicitly and the UPSC should look for talent that isn't available within the system.
- \n
- The lateral entry scheme, if implemented properly, may foster more competitive spirit, and break the complacency of the higher civil servants.
- \n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n\n

\n\n

\n

