Reforming the Bureaucracy

Why in news?

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Union government recently announced lateral entry of joint secretaries as a measure of reform in bureaucracy.

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What is the role of IAS officers in governance?

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- IAS officers are selected through the Civil Services Examination (CSE) conducted by the UPSC.
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- About 200-300 trainee officers are selected from this examination and attend sectoral training after selection.
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- The functioning of the state machinery, from the appointment of employees to disbursement of funds, requires the explicit approval of IAS officers.
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- The head of the department is the secretary, who is an IAS officer and whose typical term is of three years.
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- As per the Constitution, the secretary is responsible for the smooth functioning of the entire department.
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- This includes the day-to-day running, effecting improvements in its functioning and outcomes, making suitable suggestions to the minister, etc.
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What are the concerns with the role of secretaries?

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- In the system of bureaucracy there is no guarantee that the secretary has the required training, background or expertise in enterprise management.
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- This means that the entire department must rely on the long experience across departments and the “superior understanding” of the secretary.
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- If the state wants to initiate disciplinary action against a particular officer, it requires the permission of the central government.
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- Any reform depends on the chance that the secretary is open to inputs from his subordinate senior managers, the outcomes of such a system are obviously patchy.
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What is the need for decision on lateral entry of officers?

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- The planning, design and test procedures being used by the engineers and geologists in various government department are outdated.
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- The antiquated job profiles of government servants and moribund senior administration are important reasons for a creeping privatisation and periodic freezes on state recruitments.
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- It is also responsible for the absence of new professions, new research and smart companies in several key sectors such as water, public transport and logistics.
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- This called for a drastic change in the structure of the department and the roles and responsibilities of IAS officers.
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- The recently proposed lateral entry is one such mechanism at the Union level.
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What further measures needs to be taken?

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- Every government department should create a new section called “Analysis and Research (AR)”, which is led by an officer at the level of a deputy secretary.
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- The section should be adequately staffed at the division and district level and have its own guaranteed funding.
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- The main task of the deputy secretary will be to prepare and maintain a detailed documentation of the working procedures within the department.
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- Such reports will ensure that the people at large appreciate the scale of the problems and are mobilised to work towards their solution.
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- It will also help students, researchers, funding agencies and industry to identify problem areas and come forward with possible approaches to bring improvements in the sector.
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Source: Indian Express

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