Role of Civil Services in Democracy

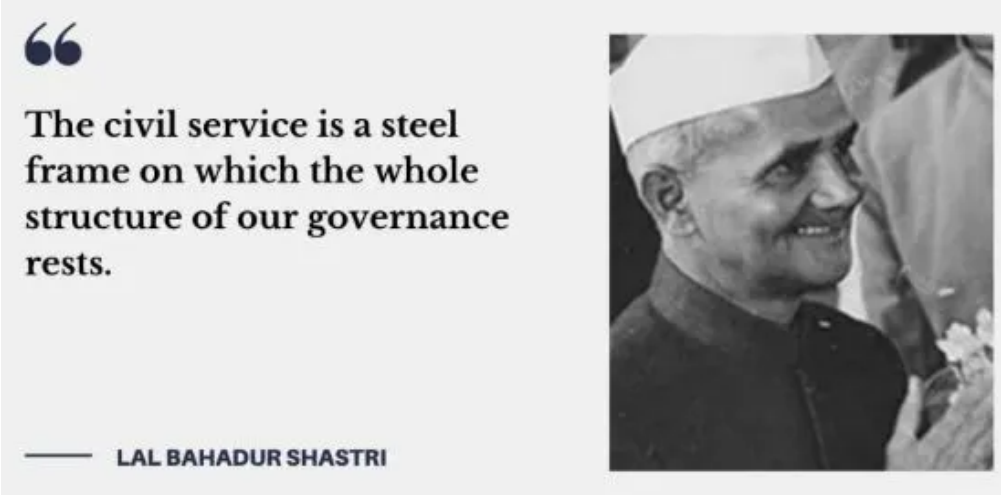
Mains Syllabus: GS II - Role of civil services in a democracy.

Why in News?

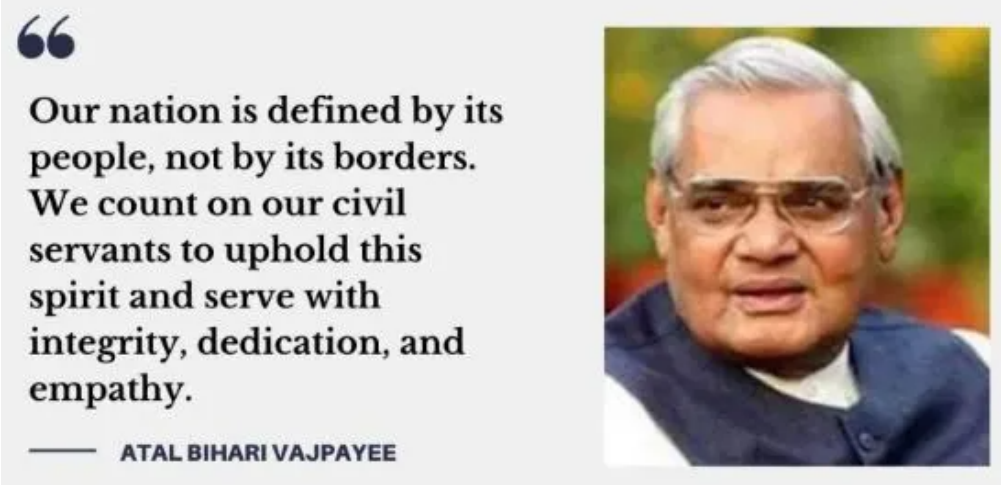
Civil Services Day is celebrated on April 21.

What are the significances of civil services in public administration?

- **Steel frame of governance** – Civil service is a steel frame on which the whole structure of our governance rests, said Lal Bahadur Shastri.



- **Preserving constitutional order** - It is the duty of the civil services to preserve the constitutional order such as democracy, rule of law, national unity and the federal structure.



- **Assisting political executives** - In a democracy, it is the elected government which has the mandate, and it is the duty of the civil servant to assist the government in carrying out its policies.
- **Ensuring free and fair elections** – Election commission of India through it's civil servants have been playing a critical role in ensuring free, fair, and efficient elections, which are the foundation of electoral democracy.
- **Smooth transfer of power** - Unlike other countries in the neighbourhood which have seen military coup and violent overthrow of governments, Civil servants in India have ensured smooth transfer of power whenever a government changes.
- **Handling emergencies** – Civil services play a crucial and frontline role during constitutional crises, national emergencies, and President's Rule in India.
- Their neutrality, administrative experience, and continuity make them essential for maintaining governance and stability in such situations.
    - **During National emergency** - Civil servants, especially the IAS and IPS officers, ensure internal security, manage public unrest, and maintain peace during emergencies like war, external aggression, or armed rebellion.
    - **During President's rule** – During President's rule in a state, the state's political executive is dissolved.
    - With no elected government, civil servants led by the Chief Secretary and other senior officials assist the Governor in ensuring uninterrupted governance and administration.



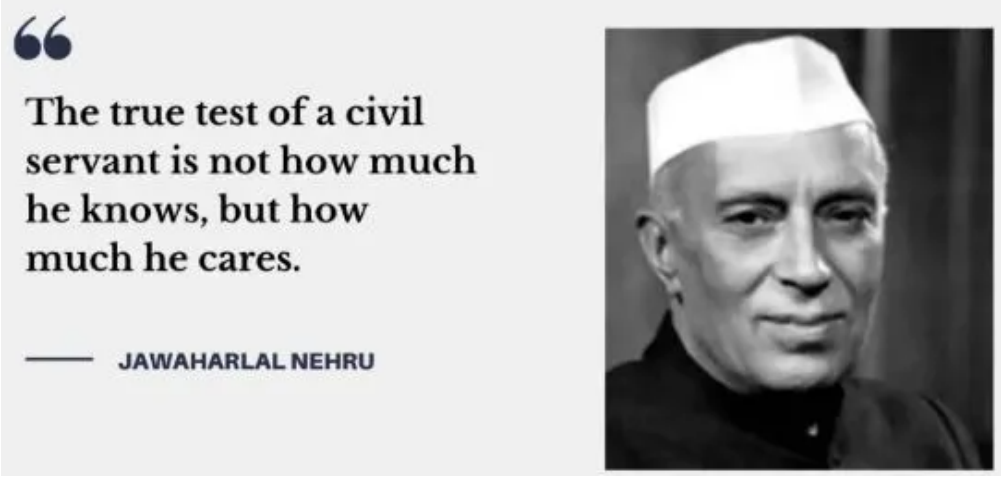
What are challenges faced by civil servants?

- **Maintaining political neutrality** – Civil servants often face pressure from elected officials to make decisions that benefit them or their allies, rather than following the law or best practices.
- This can create a conflict of interest and make it difficult for officers to do their jobs effectively.
- **Public pressure and expectations** - Civil servants are expected to solve complex problems and meet the needs of a large and diverse population.
- Officers face criticism from the public for unpopular measures which are essential for efficiency in public administration.
- **Lack of infrastructure and resources** - Many Indian districts, particularly in rural areas, lack proper infrastructure and resources.

- This can make it challenging for IAS officers to implement government programs and deliver services effectively.
- **Deficiencies in performance appraisal** - Favoritism, personal rivalry, or political pressure can skew ratings, affecting fairness of annual Performance Assessment Report system.
- Despite the news about many corrupt civil servants, almost all the IAS officers have rating between 9 and 10, as indicated by Cabinet Secretary.
- **Hurdles in promotion** – Despite good performances, some civil servants are not empanelled as Joint Secretary.
- The officer is also not given any feedback on why the empanelment was not done.
- **Low salary structure** – Secretary level officer are equivalent in capacity to the CEOs of esteemed corporates.
- But their salaries do not account for one tenth of corporate equivalent which disincentivises their performance and leads to corruption.
- **Work-Life Balance** - Civil service careers, especially for IAS and IPS officers in their initial postings, often involve long hours and frequent transfers.
- This can strain personal relationships and make it difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

What lies ahead?

- Officers need to be politically neutral since the respect for AIS officers emanates from a perception that decision making would be neutral and unbiased, and would enable the nation to achieve the objectives outlined in the preamble of the Constitution.
- There is a need for greater competence and subject matter expertise among civil servants which can be addressed with lateral entry expertise.



History of Civil Servants in India

Early Civil Service (East India Company Era)

• Lord Cornwallis is considered as 'Father of Civil Services in India'.
• The Charter Act of 1793 established covenanted civil services, which led to a more structured administration and pensions for employees.
• Until the mid-19th century, Directors of the East India Company nominated youth for civil service.
• The Covenanted Civil Service formed the European elite of Indian administration.
• Lord Wellesley founded the College of Fort William in Calcutta in 1800 to educate young recruits for the Civil Services.
• But the directors of the Company, in 1806, replaced it with their own East Indian College at Haileybury in England.
• Entry required passing a simple examination and through a system of patronage for admission to the Company's College at Haileybury.
• Training at Haileybury included 2 years of study in Law, Political Economy, and Indian Languages.
• Appointees were sent to India after training.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy & Civil Service Reform

• Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the father of Indian nationalism was the first Indian to have placed the demand for reform of the civil service in India in a formal manner.
• In his evidence before the select committee of the British Parliament before the grant of Charter in 1832 he asserted that many of the Indians were fully qualified to discharge the duties assigned to them.

Transition to Competitive Examinations & Macaulay's Reforms (1853–1859)

• Before 1853 EIC directors appointed Civil Servants and Board of Control members were allowed to make some nominations.
• Charter Act of 1853 abolished the patronage system and introduced open competitive examinations.
• Reformers like Sir Charles Trevelyan and Robert Lowe supported competitive exams as a way to select candidates with character and ability.
• Macaulay Committee (1855) recommendations: Lord Macaulay's Report introduced a merit-based civil service.
  - Civil servants should be university graduates (preferably from Oxford or Cambridge).
  - Emphasis placed on general academic education, not vocational or legal training.
  - Recommended replacing the patronage system with competitive examinations.
• A Civil Service Commission was established in London (1854).
• Age limit: Minimum 18 years, Maximum 25 years. Syllabus was heavily focused on European Classics, disadvantaging Indian aspirants.
• The first competitive exams for the Indian Civil Services (ICS) were held in London in 1855.

Indian Entry into Indian Civil Services (ICS)

• Indian Civil Services Act of 1861 - Recruitment to civil services was structured to reserve key posts for the British through the Covenanted Civil Service.
• It allowed Indians and Europeans with at least seven years of residence in India to hold certain offices.
• They had to pass an exam in the local vernacular of their assigned district.
• First Indian to clear ICS: Satyendranath Tagore in 1864.
• Despite efforts, simultaneous exams in India were denied for decades. British reluctance aimed at limiting Indian success in ICS

Indian Civil Service Exams in India (Post WWI)

• Due to Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, simultaneous exams were approved.
• From 1922, ICS exams began in India (initially in Allahabad now Prayagraj, later Delhi).
• Public Service Commission was established on 1 October 1926.
• Exams in London continued alongside.

Judicial and Administrative Reforms (1876–1935)

• 1876: Covenanted Civil Service was restructured into Executive and Judicial branches to enhance justice delivery.
• Judicial training made compulsory for those aspiring to be District Judges.
• Deputy Collectors were appointed by District Collectors in consultation with the Board of Revenue, without competitive exams.
• **The Aitchison Commission** – It was formed in 1886 aimed to enhance Indian participation in public services.
• It recommended the abolition of the Statutory Civil Service, classification of services into Imperial, Provincial, and Subordinate categories.
• It also recommended capping the civil service entry age at 23 years and advised discontinuing simultaneous examinations in England and India.
• **The Islington Commission's report (1917)** - It recommended that 25 percent of the higher government posts should go to Indians.
• 1918: 50 Indians were nominated to the Indian Civil Service by the Secretary of State.
• Lee Royal Commission on Superior Civil Service in India(1923) - The purpose was to consider the ethnic composition of the superior Indian public services of the government of India.
• The Commission recommended the division of main services into three classes.
  - All India Services
  - Central Services
  - Provincial Services
• Government of India Act 1935 established the Federal Public Service Commission.
• Through Public Service Commission for each of the provinces, provisional autonomy was introduced.

Imperial Police Service

• Superior police officers formed part of the Imperial Police.
• First open competition in 1893 in England; top 10 became probationary ASPs.
• Indians allowed entry post-1920.
• Exams held in both India and England from 1921.
• Indianisation was slow, despite Islington and Lee Commissions.
• Till 1931, Indians filled only 20% of SP posts.
• Post-1939, more Indians were recruited due to lack of suitable European candidates.

Imperial Forest Service

• Imperial Forest Department established in 1864.
• Imperial Forest Service (IFS) constituted in 1867.
• Officers trained in France and Germany (1867–1885), then Coopers Hill, London till 1905.
• From 1920, recruitment held in both India and England, and by promotion from provincial services.
• Post-independence, the Indian Forest Service (IFS) was created in 1966 under All India Services Act, 1951.

Post-Independence Developments

• 1947: After transfer of power, the Indian Civil Service was replaced by the Indian Administrative Service (IAS).
• 1950: Federal Public Service Commission was replaced by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

References

1. The Hindu | Civil services
2. The Indian Express | Key historical moments in the evolution of India’s Civil Services

