Trimming Bureaucracy

What is the issue?

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- Just five departments in the Union government — railways, police, audit and accounts, revenue and posts — account for about 88% of its total civilian employees.
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- It is against the Central Government's promise of maximum governance with minimum government.
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- There may be different understanding of the goals of maximum governance with minimum government.
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- The commitment of Minimum Government and Maximum Governance may be judged by is reflected in the fewer number of government clearances now needed and the reduced time now taken in the movement of official files.
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- But surely, the size of the bureaucracy should also be one of the criteria for judging how well the government has done in fulfilling that promise.
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What the trend shows?

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- Employees of the **Indian Railways**, whose annual budget has now been amalgamated with the Union Budget, account for **almost 37%** of the total civilian manpower on the Union government's rolls.
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- Police forces account for the next largest share in total government manpower. At about 1.1 million, their share now is 31% of the total

employees of the Centre.
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- The growth in the number of employees under the **departments of post, revenue, and audit and accounts** continue unchecked.
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- The other puzzle is the rising number of employees in the revenue department and in the department of audit and accounts — both under the Ministry of Finance.
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What can be done?

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- **Corporatising the Indian Railways**, and the Union government's employees strength would decline to a more manageable strength of 2.24 million.
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- The government should move fast on converting the Indian Railways, initially, into a public sector undertaking and then gradually reduce its stake in the country's largest transporter of goods and passengers.
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- This move will reduce the government's employee strength, force the Indian Railways to be more efficient, create a **new source of disinvestment revenue** for the central exchequer and eventually pave the way for its strategic sale, with the government retaining a stake of just 26 per cent.
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- **The Department of Posts**, which is now busy launching a payments bank, should consider a structure by which its existing employees base could be retrained for necessary redeployment.
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- The employees' strength of this department can be reduced at a time when technology is making it possible to achieve more with less people and gain the necessary cost advantage to compete with private sector courier companies.
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- There is 123 % rise in the revenue department and audit department. The question that needs to be answered is whether **greater use of electronic modes of tax administration and scrutiny requires more people or less**.

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Source: Business Standard

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