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The Big Picture: Lateral Door to the Indian Bureaucracy

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The government has opened up senior-level bureaucratic posts in several departments to the private sector individuals who are “talented and motivated” and willing to contribute in nation building. A circular issued by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) also informed the public that the government is looking for ten “outstanding individuals” with expertise in various fields to join the government at the level of Joint Secretary.”

This is being considered as a step towards lateral recruitment to senior positions in the government.

Joint Secretary

- Joint Secretary is a post and a rank under the Central Staffing Scheme of the Government of India.
- Joint secretary is an ex-cadre post, that means that it is a temporary post and anyone can occupy it, but the position holder should have mostly had an experience as a civil servant, generally from the Indian Administrative Service, and should be a government official of high seniority.
- The authority for creation of this post solely rests with the Cabinet of the Government of India.

Powers and Responsibilities

- Joint secretaries rank 26th on Indian Order of Precedence
- Joint Secretary is the overall in-charge of the Wing of the Departments which are allocated and entrusted to him.
- Joint secretaries are at a crucial level of senior management in the government of India and lead policy-making as well as implementation of various programs and schemes in the department assigned to them.
- Additional Secretaries and Joint Secretaries worldwide are responsible for filing all affidavits and responses before the Supreme Court of respective countries.
- They report to the secretary/additional secretary in the ministry or department.

Criteria and Other Details

The persons applying for the post of a joint secretary should

- Be of more than 40 years of age
- Be a graduate from a recognized university or institute. Higher qualifications would be an added advantage.
- Applications to the following departments are sought: revenue, financial services, economic affairs, agriculture, cooperation and farmers' welfare, road transport and highway, shipping, environment, forests and climate change, new and renewable energy, civil aviation and commerce.

Experience

- Officers of any state or union territory government with relevant experience who are already working at an equivalent level or are eligible for an appointment to an equivalent level in their cadre.
- Individuals working at comparable levels in public sector undertakings, autonomous bodies, statutory organizations, universities, recognized research institutes.
- Those working at comparable levels in private sector companies, consultancy organizations, international or multinational organizations.

What Was the Need?

- Shortfall of IAS and IPS officers- The issue of dearth of IAS and IPS officers was highlighted in the Baswan Committee Report as well. However, the number of officers which can be inducted through UPSC CSE is limited and this may lead to compromise with the quality of the recruits and problems in training them at LBSNAA.
- Administration has become complex in terms of maintaining peace and order and the government aims to develop various fields of economy.
- The officers recruited by the means of competitive examination have the knowledge of all the generalities but lack expert knowledge in any particular field.
- Very often, the officers who are given training for a particular domain are transferred to some other due to administrative reasons.

Has this happened for the first time?

- Many eminent personalities have been directly brought into the government services in the past. Nandan Nilekani, Vijay Kelkar, Arvind Subramanian and Raghuram Rajan are all cases in point.
- Montek Singh Ahluwalia was appointed as the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission.
- Space scientist Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan, who headed the Indian Space Research Organisation, and who also effectively played his role as chancellor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University and as member of the Rajya Sabha; was appointed as a member of the erstwhile Planning Commission of India.
- Dr. Manmohan Singh was appointed as an advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Trade and later became Chief Economic Adviser in the Ministry of Finance and then Secretary in the Finance Ministry.

All these persons have performed brilliantly and have been successful in their respective careers.

What led to the decision?

The proposal of lateral entry is aimed at bringing in fresh ideas and new approaches to governance and also to augment manpower.

— *DoPT notification*

- The *Shashi Tharoor-led Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs* in May 2016 recommended for the expansion of the pool of applicants for the posts of ambassadors and high commissioners to beyond officers of the Indian Foreign Service and invite "eminent persons who have excelled in the field of community affairs, diaspora issues, foreign policy, area studies, literature, journalism etc".

- *Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal* recommended it in 2015.
- In 2005, the *second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)* recommended an institutionalized, transparent process for lateral entry at both the Central and state levels.
- The need for specialized skills and knowledge to inform policy-making and administration is more important than ever and consequently. *The Surinder Nath Committee and the Hota Committee* followed suit in 2003 and 2004, respectively, as did the second ARC.

Revision of Civil Services Examination

- *The Union Public Service Commission has so far constituted following committees for review of different aspects of Civil Services Examination including the language issues:*
- Kothari Committee – In 1976, the Kothari committee recommended a sequential system of examination based on the dictum that “the average quality would get richer as the stream proceeds from one ‘stage to the next’. Accordingly the examination was designed as a sequential three stage process - an objective type Preliminary examination, a Main examination and finally a Personality Test.
- In 1989, Satish Chandra Committee was appointed to suggest reforms and accordingly, an ‘Essay’ paper was introduced and the marks for the Interview were enhanced.
- Y.K. Alagh Committee, in 2001, recommended significant changes and it was this committee along with the committee discussed next that led to the introduction of a Civil Services Aptitude Test at the Preliminary level from the year 2011.
- S.K. Khanna committee, chaired by ex-chairman, All India Council for Technical Education with engineering and management professors and bureaucrats as its members tried to remove the confusion that was created by so many former committees. The committee recommended a CSAT format, which was discussed within the UPSC and a draft sent to the government for approval. The present CSAT was notified.
- Nigavekar Committee is thought to induce a system in UPSC pattern to judge the communications skills of the candidate, be it in any language.
- Baswan Committee about which we had already discussed was the last such committee to give recommendations to the UPSC.

How the civil servants are selected in other countries

- In Ireland and the United Kingdom, experience gained in both the civil service and the private sector is taken into account when appointments are made.
- In USA also the private intellectual is used in high posts what is known as the spoils system.

Advantages of Lateral Entry

- This will bring subject field expertise who can contribute in a multitude of ways to nation building. Domains like environment and energy, which are forming the new fronts of development, need to be worked upon with prior knowledge and experience.
- This will also serve as a platform for inoculating new ideas and fresh methodologies in the governance.
- The competitive nature of the private players will bring more focused and target-oriented approach in the rather archaic civil services.
- Right now, the civil services suffer from complacency and red-tapism. This step may bring more customer focus in the public welfare schemes and projects.
- Private sector is observed to have stricter norms regarding corruption, better risk management methodologies and other skills to the bureaucracy.

Challenges Regarding Lateral Entry

- The process of selection is one of the key issues related to this concept. As of now, the recruitments to these posts are made by the virtue of a competitive exam conducted by UPSC which is a constitutional body. This ensures transparency and fairness in the selection procedure. However, if the lateral entry selections are made by any other body, chances of it being politically influenced are high.
- The three to five year time limit for the lateral entry recruits is not enough for making any significant contribution to the department they are inducted to.
- It is possible that the new recruits may use this opportunity to make contacts and private gains as the period of their service is too short to be taken as a career alternative.
- As the private sector is profit-driven, the persons working in that may also have the same approach which is quite contrary to the administrative service as it is welfare-driven.
- Even if the lateral entrants possess knowledge regarding the subject matter they may be severely lacking the knowledge of ground-level realities and motivation to serve the nation.
- The evaluation of the performance of such high level posts will be difficult due to the amorphous and complex nature of the job and till the selected applicant is being evaluated for his job he would be going to get terminated as there is time limit of three to five years.
- One of the prominent questions which may arise out of this new system is that whether there will be reservations for the scheduled and other backwards classes in it.
- Many recruits from private sectors like those in Air India and Vayudoot (State owned regional airline) couldn't leave a mark.
- Sometimes, even the East India Company is cited as an example of a failure that occurs when a profit seeking entity takes over the task of governance.

Way Forward

- Though the concept of lateral entry is innovative and will bring more inclusivity and diversity in the governance, it needs to be implemented properly in a phased manner.
- It needs to be ensured that the process of selection of lateral entrants remains fair and transparent.
- The lateral entrants should be provided with proper training so that they can use their ideas for the benefit of the public.
- The time period of inductance should be extended. This will ensure more accountability on the part of entrants and will give them career security as well.
- It is also imperative that along with including personalities from diverse arenas, the existing system is reformed internally, made competitive and freed of political pressures. It is high time that the bureaucratic system sheds off the colonial burden, develops a culture of honesty and trust and inculcates innovative ideas.