



Stimulus For Governance

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This editorial is based on the article **A stimulus for governance** which was published in The Hindu BusinessLine on 13/10/2021. It talks about the advantages and issues associated with the induction of ex-bureaucrats in the Cabinet.

It is argued that since Independence, India has often fallen short of efficient execution of policies. Notwithstanding the huge progress made in areas such as space and information technology, India appears to be struggling in several basic, yet key, social sector areas such as healthcare, education, sanitation, housing and food security.

To ameliorate the living standard of the people, it is appropriate for the present dispensation to trust bureaucrats/professionals, given their training and experience in policy implementation at the grassroots levels, as the country embarks on celebrating its 75th anniversary of Independence.

Now inducting professionals as Cabinet ministers in the **Council of Ministers (COMs)** seems to have become a new paradigm in India. The decision has its own advantages and disadvantages and thus, there is a need to evaluate the decision.

Advantages of Ex-Bureaucrats in COMs

- **Execution Friendly Policies:** The experience of bureaucrats helps them shape policy which is both feasible and execution-friendly.
- **Low Allegiance to any Ideology:** Another advantage of their induction into the council of ministers is that their relatively low allegiance to any ideology means little or no political baggage, thus paving the way for long-term decisions in public interest.
- **Avoid Populist Measures:** Elected representatives have an inclination to take populist measures for short term political gains, which later take a toll on the overall health of the economy.

Such policies often become instruments of patronage and pilferage. Seasoned bureaucrats turned politicians think pragmatically and seldom make promises that are difficult to fulfil

- **Bureaucrats Know the System Inside out:** Knowing the system inside out, it is much easier for them to break inter- and intra-departmental silos, which can lead to a significant reduction in red tape and, thereby, improvement in productivity.
 - Several economies bear testimony to the fact that when policies were entirely re-engineered, it led to dramatic progress — India liberalising its economy in the early 1990s is one such example.
- **Quick And Seamless Implementation of Welfare Measures:** The experiment of involving professionals with elected representatives will not only strengthen our parliamentary democracy but also help in quick and seamless implementation of welfare measures for the common man.
 - Crisis management and skill sets to utilise resources optimally give professionals the extra edge vis-à-vis their elected counterparts in the Cabinet.
- **Strategic Intellectual and Managerial Skills:** While they may have to struggle initially to gain the acceptance and trust of the workforce and the general public, their ability to encourage team effort should work in their favour soon.
 - Besides, given their administrative experience they can be of immense value to the government for tackling conflicts, disputes, and protests.
 - Also, their strategic intellectual and managerial skills can be utilised for building consensus among sparring stakeholders. Hence, their involvement should help raise the governance bar.

Challenges of Inducting Bureaucrats as Ministers

- **Not Elected Representatives:** The bureaucrats are not elected representatives and sometimes may ignore people's will in carrying out their duties.
 - It is thus many times said that the populist politics favours the concept of democracy and listens to the people's voices.
 - But seasoned politicians always have a better understanding of what people want. They know the pulse of the people better.
- India, with its diversity in respect of geography, demography, climate, economy, culture and social structures, requires specialised treatment for its problems at various locations.
 - A one-size-fits-all approach is not a panacea for all its problems, especially in policy execution.
 - Thus there is a need for a wide representation of communities in the Cabinet. Moreover, the inclusion of hand picked bureaucrats may cause exclusion of participation rather than inclusion in the council of ministers (COMs).

Way Forward

- **Strengthening the Institutions of Governance:** Parliament is the supreme representative institution in India. The political representative represents the electorate. Hence, there is a need to develop good practices and procedures of parliamentary functioning and make Parliament a dynamic institution in tune with the changing times.
- **Open Government is a Key Element of Governance Reform:** The environment of secrecy that pervades government functioning encourages malpractices. There is no early check because decisions are taken behind closed doors. Thus there is a need to strengthen the **Right to Information** system in India.
- **Not Only Governance, But Good Governance:** The objectives of the government and administration must be achieving 'good governance'. Good governance is characterised by **participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law.**
- **Capacity Building of Local Self Government:** There is a lack of human resources, knowledge (skill-based and "knowhow") or infrastructural resources available to local self governments to carry out tasks.

Conclusion

Having said that, a fine balance between elected representatives and bureaucrats/professionals is the need of the hour for the Indian parliamentary system in view of the ever growing global and domestic socio-economic challenges.

Participation of both would be vital for the government to improve governance and service delivery to its people.

Drishti Mains Question

Inducting ex-bureaucrats as Cabinet ministers can help policy making and implementation become effective and efficient in India. Evaluate.
