

NEXT IAS

**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**INDIA'S 'STEEL FRAME' DOES NEED
A CHECK**

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In Context

- India's governance challenges demand urgent reforms to modernise its bureaucracy, particularly the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), which has long served as the **backbone of the country's administrative machinery**.

About

- Despite the **IAS's critical role in policy implementation and governance, persistent inefficiencies, politicisation, and lack of specialisation** have necessitated transformative changes to unlock India's economic potential and enhance administrative effectiveness.
- Originating from the **Colonial Indian Civil Service (ICS)**, the IAS has been a symbol of governance post-Independence, earning the title of **India's "steel frame."**
- However, this legacy is **marred by challenges that have eroded its effectiveness** in a rapidly modernising economy.

Key Challenges

- Politicisation:** Frequent transfers, promotions, and suspensions based on political loyalties undermine morale and professionalism.
- Lack of Specialisation:** Generalist training and frequent rotations across departments prevent IAS officers from developing domain expertise, crucial for handling complex policy issues.
- Corruption and Inefficiency:** India's moderate ranking on the World Bank's government effectiveness index reflects systemic inefficiencies in policy implementation and administrative independence.
- Centralised Governance:** The increasing concentration of power in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has sidelined bureaucratic insights, reducing their role in effective policymaking.

Previous Reform Efforts

- Administrative Reforms Commissions (ARCs):** The First ARC (1966) and Second ARC (2005) made critical recommendations, including:
 - Lowering the entry age for civil services.
 - Introducing performance-based promotions.
 - Allowing lateral entry to bring in domain expertise.
 - Safeguarding against arbitrary transfers.
- However, implementation has been inconsistent, often **hindered by political resistance and bureaucratic inertia**.
- Supreme Court Directive (2013):** Mandated the establishment of civil services boards to oversee bureaucratic transfers and postings. Despite this, enforcement has been weak.
- Lateral Entry:** Recognising the limitations of an IAS-centric model, the government introduced lateral recruitment into senior bureaucratic roles, targeting domain experts from the private sector and academia.
 - By 2023, only 33% of Joint Secretaries at the Centre were from the IAS, compared to near-total dominance a decade ago.
 - Positions such as Joint Secretaries and Directors across ministries now welcome private sector professionals, adding fresh perspectives and specialised knowledge. Resistance from within the IAS, citing morale and promotion concerns.
 - Opposition parties have raised concerns over the lack of reservation provisions for marginalised groups in lateral entry appointments.
- Accountability Measures:** Efforts to curb politicised transfers and enhance transparency.
 - Push for data-driven performance metrics to evaluate bureaucratic effectiveness.

Lessons from Global Models: The U.S. Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)

- The **U.S. Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)** provides a compelling model for India's administrative reforms. **DOGE focuses on:**

- ◆ **Streamlining operations:** Eliminating redundancies and inefficiencies.
- ◆ **Accountability:** Introducing performance metrics and data-driven decision-making.
- ◆ **Expert Leadership:** Leveraging expertise from leaders across industries.
- India could adopt a similar **advisory framework:**
 - ◆ A **time-bound commission** to identify inefficiencies and recommend reforms.
 - ◆ Metrics to assess bureaucratic performance and **streamline decision-making.**
 - ◆ An expiration date for the commission to ensure actionable and focused outcomes.

Challenges to Reform

- **Resistance Within the IAS:** Deeply institutionalised seniority-based progression and generalist approaches.
 - ◆ Fear of diminished influence due to lateral entries.
- **Political Interference:** Politically motivated transfers and promotions undermine reform efforts.
 - ◆ Legislative proposals like the Civil Services Standards, Performance, and Accountability Bill (2010) have stalled due to lack of political consensus.
- **Implementation Gaps:** Many reform recommendations, including those from ARCs, remain unimplemented due to bureaucratic inertia and lack of enforcement mechanisms.

Way Forward

- Reforming India's bureaucracy requires a multifaceted approach to address structural, operational, and cultural challenges:
- **Merit-Based Recruitment and Promotions:** Focus on domain expertise rather than generalist skills.
 - ◆ Tie promotions to measurable performance metrics.
- **Specialised Training:** Equip officers with sector-specific knowledge to handle complex governance issues effectively.
- **Lateral Entry Expansion:** Institutionalise the process, ensuring transparency and inclusivity, including reservation provisions for underrepresented groups.
- **Safeguards Against Politicisation:** Strengthen civil services boards to protect officers from arbitrary transfers and ensure tenure stability.
- **Data-Driven Governance:** Develop a robust data infrastructure to track bureaucratic performance and inform decisions on placements and promotions.
- **Streamlined Structure:** Rationalise overlapping roles and responsibilities across ministries and departments to reduce redundancy.

Source: TH



Mains Practice Question

India's governance challenges demand a multifaceted approach to administrative reform. Critically evaluate the recommendations of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) in addressing these challenges and their implementation status.