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UNDERSTANDING LATERAL ENTRY INTO THE INDIAN BUREAUCRACY

This article covers "Daily Current Affairs" and topic details of the Lateral entry: advantages, issues, and recommendations.

SYLLABUS MAPPING:
GS 2: Polity: Working, structure, and functions of Executives.
Governance: the role of civil services in the democracy,

FOR PRELIMS:
What are the constitutional provisions related to the administrative set at the union level?

FOR MAINS:
What is lateral entry, its objectives, advantages, recent controversy, and recommendations related to making lateral entry more efficient?

WHY IN THE NEWS?
The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) recently issued a notification for the recruitment of 45 positions including joint secretaries, directors, and deputy secretaries through lateral entry. This move is aimed at bringing in specialists from outside the traditional government service cadres, including professionals from the private sector, to fill these senior roles in various government departments.

WHAT IS LATERAL ENTRY INTO BUREAUCRACY?

Lateral entry into bureaucracy is a practice designed to recruit individuals from outside the traditional civil service cadre to fill mid- and senior-level government positions. Under this system, candidates are generally appointed on contractual terms ranging from three to five years, with the possibility of extension based on their performance and contributions.

The rationale behind lateral entry is to address complex governance and policy challenges by incorporating specialized expertise not readily available within the conventional bureaucratic structure. This approach aims to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of governance by leveraging external knowledge and skills.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The concept of lateral entry is not entirely new and has historical precedents. It was first recommended by the **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) established in 2005 under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government led by Congress, chaired by Veerappa Moily**. The ARC's recommendations highlighted the need for integrating professionals from various sectors such as private industry, academia, and public sector undertakings (PSUs) to improve policy implementation and administrative efficiency. This move was aimed at bringing specialized knowledge to roles where traditional civil services might lack expertise.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

2014-2015: The Indian government began exploring lateral entry as a means to introduce expertise into senior administrative positions.

2018: The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) issued a notification inviting applications for lateral entry into key government roles, including secretaries and joint secretaries in various ministries.

2020: Further steps were taken to formalize the process, with specific guidelines and criteria for recruitment.

WHY LATERAL ENTRY IS NEEDED?

Skill Gaps in Traditional Civil Services: Traditional civil services may lack the specialized skills required for modern governance challenges, such as digital transformation and advanced data analysis.

Dynamic Policy Challenges: Rapid changes in technology and global trends necessitate expertise that may not be present within the conventional civil service structure.

Global Best Practices: Many countries have successfully implemented lateral entry to bring in high-level expertise and improve administrative functions.

WHAT ARE THE MERITS OF LATERAL ENTRY?

1. Enhancing Expertise and Innovation: NITI Aayog has advocated for lateral entry as a means to bring in specialized expertise and fresh perspectives. By recruiting professionals from diverse fields, including the private sector and academia, the government can infuse the bureaucracy with innovative ideas and approaches. This aligns with the Aayog's broader goal of fostering a more dynamic and efficient governance structure.

2. Addressing Skill Gaps: The Aayog has highlighted that lateral entry helps address specific skill gaps in the administration. For example, positions requiring advanced knowledge in technology, finance, or management can benefit from the inclusion of experts who bring a high level of specialization not always present within traditional civil services.

3. Improving Governance: According to the Aayog, lateral entry can enhance the effectiveness of policy implementation. By recruiting individuals with relevant skills and experiences, the government aims to improve the quality of decision-making and administrative processes, leading to more effective and efficient governance.

4. Promoting Reforms: NITI Aayog supports lateral entry as part of broader administrative reforms aimed at modernizing the bureaucracy. The Aayog views this approach as a way to break away from outdated practices and bring about necessary changes in how government functions, making it more responsive and capable of tackling contemporary challenges.

5. Lateral Entry as a Necessity: The second ARC recommended the introduction of lateral entry to bring specialized skills and expertise into civil services. It emphasized that professionals from various sectors could contribute significantly to governance and administrative efficiency.

6. Recruitment from Diverse Sectors: According to the Arvind Pangaria Committee of 2016, lateral entry would encourage recruiting from diverse sectors, including private industry and academia, to infuse new perspectives and practices into the government.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES RELATED TO THE LATERAL ENTRY?
The Second ARC:
Resistance to Change: The Second ARC noted that there might be resistance from within the existing bureaucracy to the integration of lateral entrants, potentially leading to conflicts and disruptions.

Integration Challenges: The Second ARC raised concerns about how lateral entrants would integrate with the established bureaucratic processes and culture, suggesting the need for effective induction and training programs.

K. P. Geethakrishnan Committee:
Lack of Clear Criteria: K. P. Geethakrishnan's committee identified the absence of clear criteria and transparent processes for selecting lateral entrants as a significant issue. This lack of clarity could lead to perceptions of favoritism and undermine the credibility of the process.

Implementation Challenges: Highlighted difficulties in integrating lateral entrants into the existing bureaucratic framework, which could impact their effectiveness and acceptance.

Arvind Panagariya Committee
Potential for Perceived Inequity: The committee expressed concerns that lateral entry could be perceived as bypassing traditional merit-based systems, potentially leading to dissatisfaction among career bureaucrats.

Lack of Detailed Guidelines: Noted the need for detailed guidelines and frameworks for the selection and integration of lateral entrants to ensure that the process is fair and effective.

Rangrajan committee:
Conflict of Interest: Raised concerns about potential conflicts of interest if lateral entrants have previous ties with private companies or interest groups, which could affect their impartiality and effectiveness.

Short Tenure and Transition: The committee pointed out that short tenures for lateral entrants might hinder their ability to make a significant impact and adapt to the bureaucratic environment.

WHAT ARE THE SUGGESTIONS GIVEN TO MAKE LATERAL ENTRY MORE EFFICIENT AND TRANSPARENT?
1. Focus on Merit-Based Selection: The NITI Aayog stresses the importance of ensuring that lateral entry positions are filled through a transparent and merit-based process. It advocates for clear criteria and rigorous selection procedures to ensure that only the most qualified candidates are chosen, thereby maintaining the integrity of the recruitment process.

2. Transparency and Meritocracy: The Second ARC Suggested creating a structured process for the selection of lateral entrants to ensure transparency and meritocracy.

3. Clear Criteria: The K. P. Geethakrishnan committee recommended establishing clear criteria and procedures for the recruitment of lateral entrants, focusing on expertise and experience relevant to specific government roles.

4. Integration and Training: K. P. Geethakrishnan's committee also emphasized the need for comprehensive training programs to help lateral entrants understand and adapt to the workings of the Indian bureaucracy.

5. Focus on Merit: The Ashok Mehta Committee Stressed the importance of maintaining a merit-based selection process for lateral entry to avoid perceptions of favoritism or nepotism.

6. Balanced Approach: The Ashok Mehta Committee Suggested a balanced approach where lateral entry complements rather than replaces traditional recruitment methods, ensuring a mix of experienced civil servants and fresh talent.

7. Performance Metrics: The Rangrajan committee Recommended establishing clear performance metrics to evaluate the impact of lateral entrants and ensure that their contributions align with organizational goals.

CONCLUSION

Lateral entry into the Indian bureaucracy is designed to infuse the administrative system with new skills and perspectives. While it offers significant benefits, including expertise and innovation, it also presents challenges related to integration and resistance. Addressing these challenges through structured frameworks, transparent processes, and supportive measures can help make lateral entry a more effective and pragmatic approach to administrative reform.

PRELIMS QUESTION:

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. The constitution of India provides for lateral entry for efficient administration.

2. The cabinet Secretariat is a nodal agency to conduct the recruitment for lateral entry

3. The concept of lateral entry was first time introduced in India by the first Administrative Reforms Commission

How many of the statements given above are correct?

A. Only one

B. Only two

C. All three

D. None

ANSWER: D

MAINS QUESTION:

Q. The recent notification for lateral entry recruitment attracted huge outcry from various sections of society, this context critically analyzes the lateral entry process.

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