

Hon'ble Chairman's Speech

Respected Rashtrapati ji Smt. Pratibha Devi Singh Ji Patil, Respected Minister of State, M/o Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions Shri Prithviraj Chavan, Hon'ble Member of the Commission, Distinguished guests, Ladies & Gentlemen.

It is an honour and proud privilege that our respected Rashtrapati*ji* has kindly consented to deliver the inaugural UPSC Foundation Day Lecture and launch the lecture series on Governance & Public Services that would, I am sure, be successful in providing a platform for reflection and a springboard for action along critical dimensions of governance and public policy. The founding fathers of our Republic have envisaged a pivotal role for the UPSC as the keystone in the vital machinery of governance. The responsibility for recruiting the finest talent for manning the civil services and protecting their just interests so that they may act impartially and fearlessly are some of the tasks given to the Commission under the Constitution. UPSC is also responsible for advising the Government on related matters of service that actually cover personnel policy and human resource management. It is in furthering this central role in the governance structure that we have initiated an annual lecture series focusing on the inter linkage of governance and public services. This lecture series aims at providing a forum for raising issues of contemporary relevance to governance and public administration. Through it, we hope to generate new ideas and fresh thinking. We deem it an honour that the inaugural lecture is being delivered by Honourable Rashtrapati*ji* in whose name and under whose authority the public services ultimately function. The Commission is grateful for her graceful presence today in spite of her busy schedule. The turnout of illustrious dignitaries today bodes well for this initiative.

2. The structure and process of governance are crucially affected by the nature and quality of public officials in its service. Sufficient guarantees of livelihood and career satisfaction need to be built in, so as to attract men and women of ability and character to public services. Simultaneously there is a need to ensure that *aptitude for service* is also identified among the necessary qualifications for entry.

3. This vital link between governance and public service is the context for the topic of today's lecture by respected Rashtrapatiji (*Governance and the Public Service*). It is largely true that an impartial and apolitical bureaucracy in India has strengthened governance in the country, and has contributed to its development and stability. Our bureaucracy is quite diverse and representative, representing the pluralistic ethos of the country. Civil services in India have today gained a reputation for their high standards and outstanding qualities the world over.

4. The system of recruitment to public services has been a subject of reform and innovation. UPSC has constantly strived to develop a recruitment system that tests the aptitude and competency required of an increasingly specialized public administration. At the same time, it has pursued the goal of ensuring adequate representation and social justice for the people, thereby making the government more inclusive and participatory.

5. Many challenges however remain. The tremendous growth and wide spread of knowledge today places a responsibility on the civil servant to keep abreast of latest developments so that these can be put to effective use in the country's development. At the same time, information and knowledge are no longer the monopoly of a privileged few. It has become necessary for them to

equip themselves professionally to fulfill the aspirations of the larger public that is now better educated and more aware of their rights.

6. India has a predominantly young population. Youth is the age of idealism, a stage in life that is marked by optimism, vitality, and vigour. The youngsters of today are better educated and naturally have aspirations for a better future for themselves. It is very much in the interest of the society and the country that the personnel policy of the government too takes full advantage of the 'demographic dividend' by leveraging this tremendous energy and potential of our youth.

7. The point of entry to civil services is an important stage at which some solutions to the problems of negative attitude and old mindsets could be attempted. Based on its experience of 30 years with the post-Kothari Committee scheme of the prestigious Civil Service Examination, UPSC is convinced of the need for important changes in the method of recruitment to the higher civil services that are the vehicle for public service delivery. One of the recommendations made by the Commission to the government is that a Civil Service Aptitude Test replace the existing Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination. The proposal is to have two objective type papers that are common to all candidates. The emphasis is on testing the aptitude of the candidate for the demanding life in the civil service, as well as on ethical and moral dimensions of decision-making. The proposed scheme will also provide a level-playing field and equity, since all candidates will have to attempt common papers;

It has also been proposed that the structure of the Civil Services (Main) Examination may remain the same till a Committee of Experts that may be appointed by the Commission goes into various aspects.

8. The Commission is also of the view that while lowering of age of entry to the civil services may be desirable, interests of rural candidates who may complete their graduate education later than their urban counterparts needs also to be considered. A reduction in the number of attempts allowed at the examination, as proposed by the 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission, is however called for, so as to remove the premium on cramming and memorization that a large number of attempts provides. A natural corollary to these proposed modifications is the need to ensure that the performance of the officers selected through the Civil Service Examination is tracked, particularly during the initial, formative years. The Commission may also be kept apprised of the feedback so that this can be factored into the selection process for future entrants.

9. Other than recruitment, a second method of induction to the prestigious All India Services is by promotion from State Services. The Commission have proposed after an internal review that the present system of holding Selection Committee Meetings based only on Annual Confidential Reports of State Service officers be replaced with a three tier recruitment process comprising of Limited Competitive Examination, interview, and assessment of service records to fill up the promotion quota. This would have the salutary effect of encouraging competition and privileging merit. The States will also benefit from the scheme. Such a system could, in time, be extended to promotions within the Central Services as well.

10. UPSC has also recently taken steps to solve some of the vexing issues: delays in direct recruitments by interview, delays in holding departmental promotion committee meetings, and delays in finalising disciplinary proceedings. Due to tightening of internal procedures and detailed dialogues with various indenting departments, the Commission has been able to reduce the time cycle for direct

recruitment from the earlier much larger period to now between six to nine months. Similarly, by conducting a series of meetings with indenting Ministries, there is now a better mutual appreciation of the gaps and lacunae that lead to avoidable delays in promotion and deputation proposals. On delays in disciplinary proceedings, data relied upon by the 2nd ARC shows that UPSC takes about 5% of the total time to arrive at their finding, while the bulk of the time is taken by the administrative departments to process the case.

11. UPSC is also in the process of ramping up its information technology infrastructure. Our website already contains important new information apart from recruitment announcements, status of applications, and results. We have plans for introducing computer based applications for various examinations, and for an 'always on' interactive voice response system over telephone so that interface between aspirants and the Commission is easy, efficient, and quick.

12. The Commission receives more than a million applications for all of the 14 regular examinations and other recruitments it conducts every year. We finally recommend for appointment about 5000 officers every year, after a rigorous process of screening, testing, and personal interview as necessary. We also deal with promotions of over 600 central government officers, induction of about 300 officers from the State Services into the All India Services. In addition, UPSC also gave advice in 455 disciplinary cases in 2008-09. The workload is expected to increase in the future, and we are putting in place an IT Vision for UPSC so that our internal systems and processes become more efficient.

13. Significant challenges arise in finding the right person for the job as we move up the hierarchy in public services. UPSC has expressed its readiness to participate, under its Constitutional mandate, in performance review and empanelment of senior officers of the Government of India, as well as in any proposed lateral induction process intended to widen the pool of candidates for selection to senior positions. Similarly, the Commission would welcome being associated, under Article 321 of the Constitution, with recruitments to autonomous bodies that have naturally proliferated in this era of deregulation.

14. Public trust and confidence in any organisation can be sustained only if its functioning is not only fair and just, but also transparent and this transparency is self evident and visible to the public at large. To achieve this, the Commission has been disseminating more and more information through the internet and other media, while at the same time maintaining the integrity of the system. The large number of applications seeking information under the Act is both a challenge and an opportunity to inform the wider public about the nuances of our procedures so that they understand the length to which we go to maintain impartiality and fairness in our working. The second area of concern is the increasing amount of service matter litigation in different courts. A conscious effort is required to ensure that transparency and impartiality in systems and procedures is encouraged in all aspects of service matter administration, both in government departments as well as in the Public Service Commissions, so that the trust deficit is reduced. While it is gratifying that the higher judiciary has found our processes fair and impartial, further work is needed to simplify and demystify some of our systems so that the load of litigation on the Commission is significantly reduced.

15. Before I conclude I, once again heartily welcome respected Rashtrapatiiji and all of you to today's session. The topic is of urgent relevance in today's changing environment of increased expectations, and I am sure that the inaugural lecture by no less a personage than the President of India will provide us with ample guidance as also new thoughts. In the words of our First Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

“Administration is meant to achieve something and not exist in some kind of ivory tower, following certain rules of procedure and Narcissus-like looking on itself with complete satisfaction. The test, after all, is the human being and their welfare.”

Jai Hind!