

Musings on IAS: Elitist Perceptions and Reforms towards Meritocracy

"If you are going to sin, sin against God, not the bureaucracy. God will forgive you, but the bureaucracy won't." - Hyman Rickover:

This is rather a long essay and for readability and referencing, is divided into following parts. The topic of corruption is vast, individual experiences are varied and opinions entrenched. Hence the discussion on corruption is limited to its relevance to issues of risk aversion.

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Preamble: | 1 |
| 2. Perception of IAS Elitism: | 4 |
| <i>Pedigree?</i> | 6 |
| 3. Reforms towards Meritocracy: | 6 |
| <i>Lateral Entry for meritocracy</i> | 8 |
| <i>Contracting Specialist Services</i> | 11 |
| <i>More number of lateral entrants required</i> | 12 |
| 4. Competence, Meritocracy and its measurement: | 14 |
| <i>Competence Index, KRA and KPI</i> | 18 |
| 5. Risk Aversion, Corruption: "the termite that hollows the country." | 20 |
| <i>Who moved my honesty?</i> | 21 |
| <i>Mens Rea & the Law on Torts</i> | 22 |
| <i>Officer-Political Nexus, implications, and reform suggestions</i> | 22 |
| 6. On Commitment and Credibility of IAS: two illustrative examples. | 26 |
| <i>Hedgehog, the Fox, the T-shaped people & Television debates</i> | 28 |
| 7. Non-Trivial Issues & Summary of the article | 30 |
| <i>Summary:</i> | 31 |

1. Preamble:

1.1 The subject for this discussion is regarding elitist perception about IAS and reforming it towards meritocracy. The reason is the two pieces of Dr. Duvvuri Subba Rao (1) his article (*IAS is a system that promotes mediocrity and risk aversion*) on IAS (March 25, 2022) and (2) the subsequent interview masterfully conducted by Mr. Karan Thapar with his characteristic consummate skill for The Wire on 2nd Apr 2022 (*'The IAS Has Failed India and Must Change'*).

1.2 His article in the TOI, despite the heading, starts with the lament: *"Has the IAS failed the nation? | wish the answer were a resounding 'no. Much to my regret though, that's not*

the case. The public perception of the IAS today is of an elitist, self-serving, status quo perpetuating set of bureaucrats who are out of touch with reality, who wallow in their privileges and social status and have lost the courage of conviction to stand up for what's right." This theme is continued in the interview when Mr Thapar begins it by saying *"Has the Indian administrative service failed the country? That's the opinion of one of the services most illustrious members, a former governor of the Reserve Bank of India and former Finance Secretary Duvvuri Subba Rao. Joining me now to explain why he's come to this conclusion and briefly what should be done about it is Dr. Subba Rao himself."* Mr Thapar then refers to Dr. Subba Rao's article in the TOI. In the interview Dr. Subba Rao has, inter alia, made another important observation that the service (now) rewards mediocrity & risk aversion and must reform and that the IAS has to be reformed into a meritocracy.

1.3 I have written elsewhere on his other equally important observations viz. (i) "IAS has failed the Nation" and (ii) its "biggest problem is the culture within which the IAS operates (presumably) resulting in a deeply flawed system of incentives and penalties" However, the "IAS has failed the Nation" is an important observation and before focusing the issues of perceptions of *elitism* and *reforms towards meritocracy*, I shall summarise this issue first.

1.4 As Dr. Subba Rao has observed, "(IAS) still attracts some of the best talent in the country, and young recruits come in with sharp minds and full of enthusiasm. But soon, they become cogs in the wheels of complacency and acquiescence, turn lazy and cynical, and worse, lose their moral compass." Hence equally important, to my mind is the conundrum that if IAS generally has such a seriously negative view and perception (a service that has failed the Nation) amongst the people at large, why with yearly intake not exceeding 180, the number of aspirants (including those from IITs, Regional Engineering Colleges, IIMs, Doctors etc.) to the IAS is increasing, (most of them giving IAS/IFS as their first choice) from 3.25 lakhs in 2008 to 10.57 lakhs in 2020 (though admittedly, many of them may not really be serious contenders, since 2014, about 50% of the applicants appeared for the prelim, still a large number). Many prefer All India Services to other alternative jobs in the private sector, many leave other jobs in the private sector or academia, where generally speaking, the pay differentials of their current salaries compare not too unfavourably with or may be a tad higher than the starting salaries in the IAS. The reasons could be many like perquisites like housing, vehicle, apart from the very people's perception that they are doing something different and in the spirit of public service in a prestigious IAS.

1.5 It can be nobody's case that IAS (that is a part of the All-India Services) is perfect, has no faults or that there is no scope for further improvement. That will clearly be self-deception. Hence this is not to defend the Service. Hence it is neither to extoll the virtues of

the IAS (there are many) nor its ills (that too are in abundance). This is merely an attempt to put the very relevant issues raised by Dr. Subba Rao in a border perspective. No doubt there have been black sheep within the IAS on the aspects of corruption that as the Prime minister remarked is like a termite which makes country hollow. All of us know "horror stories" of wealth amassed by IAS far beyond their known means of legitimate income. That is why there is a system of yearly property returns to be submitted to the Government by offices (all the civil services offices, as well as for the MPs and MLAs every time they file nominations, so incremental increases in wealth year after year can be ascertained). I have not come across many cases where incremental accretion to wealth far beyond known sources of income has attracted attention, except in the book *"When Crime Pays; Money and Muscle in Indian Politics"* by Milan Vaishnav (2017), stating that *"What the Indian state has been unable to provide, strongmen have promised to deliver in spades.. The foundation of this book is a unique database of candidate disclosures that have been submitted to the Election Commission of India (ECI)...."* Corruption is a vast subject; much has been written on it and hence the discussion on corruption here is limited to its relevance to issues of risk aversion.

1.6 I was particularly delighted by Mr. Karan Thapars opening remarks about *"what should be done about it"* as Dr. Subba Rao's views thereon that would have been most rewarding. However, unless I am missing something in the interview (and for which I shall duly stand corrected), except for the suggestion of "lateral entry" (that is discussed later) as an antidote for mediocrity, I did not come across any blueprint to either remove perception of elitism or road to meritocracy. Both constructive criticism and self-introspection are doubtless required for systemic improvements (towards meritocracy), accompanied by suggesting ways of required improvements. He observes, somewhat enigmatically in his TOI article that *"The IAS has to be reformed into a meritocracy. There will be resistance of course but is doable. How to go about that has to await another opinion piece"*. There have been many changes in the structure of the service. Resistance, if at all, has been muted. In his subsequent interview with Karan Thapar, he seemingly amplifies mentioning lateral entry into the higher echelons of Government of India and this suggestion is also discussed later. I am aware that the issues are complex, opinions and perceptions deeply entrenched and unanimity unlikely.

1.7 I ran my observations through some of my senior colleagues who have been intimately associated in managing the cadres of civil services (including the IAS) both at the State and Centre and have been greatly benefited by them. One of them remarked that

All-India Services function in a socio-economic and political environment which is dynamic and in a continuous state of flux. The real challenge lies in identifying,

from time to time, the appropriate reforms or changes that need to be carried out, securing a consensus among States regarding those reforms/changes, and finally the determination to implement or carry them out, all in all a daunting task. Such an approach will alone pave the way forward. Any generalisation, about a complex "system" or an entity comprising diverse elements and buffeted by a variety of factors and influences that are dynamically varying over time tends to suffer from a fault or weakness which is intrinsic to the generalisation itself!

2. Perception of IAS Elitism:

2.1 Before going further, I shall first comment on the perception of IAS being an elitist service so that issue gets out of the way. It will be trite to say that one would need at least some qualitative handle on "elitism". Is it based on social status, the permanency of the service, or its pay and perks or pomp and pelf, or cynically, opportunities of making money? Mention of this last attribute may surprise many a perceptive reader. But I have taken it straight from the "thought experiment" given by Dr. Subba Rao in his interview with Karan Thapar comparing the case of two brothers from the same household. I am giving it in his own words (Time Stamp 07:21) "*Here is a thought experiment. Take a household, two brothers, one brother gets into the IAS another brother becomes, let's say a university professor. Both of them brought up in the same household, same family values, culture traditions. The university professor has much less opportunity to be corrupt, much less temptation to be corrupt as compared to the IAS officer. So, the IAS officer succumbs to temptation of corruption. So, I would think that it's the environment that makes the IAS officer corrupt and succumb to the temptation*". Or is the perceived label or notion of elitism largely subjective, a kind of "gut feeling", like the famous 1964 quote of United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart who remarked "*I know it when I see it*". I shall have occasion to refer to this quote in discussions on meritocracy etc. later.

2.2 Over the years, precisely to remove the label of an elitist service for only for the English speaking, and to make it more representative and reflective of the Nation's diverse ethos and culture, now the IAS, along with other civil services have provisions of answers in regional languages making it more inclusive and draws within its fold, a fairly wide spectrum of cross section across India. At any rate, as of 12 April 2021 as has been noted by the Rajya Sabha panel, UPSC has changed the pattern civil service exam has changed drastically since 2010¹. Since 2010, a slew of changes has been introduced in the civil service examination — from the number of optional papers to the introduction of the Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT) paper; an increase in the number of general studies papers; or the elimination of

¹ <https://theprint.in/india/governance/upsc-changed-many-exam-rules-in-10-yrs-now-mps-want-to-know-how-they-impacted-civil-service/638283/?amp>

foreign languages from the language paper.

2.3 These changes, several experts have said, have fundamentally altered the composition of the country's top bureaucracy. The then Secretary Department of Personnel and Training Satynanand Mishra said before the said panel that the changes introduced by the UPSC have ensured that the bureaucracy is more representative than ever before. "If you say that there are a lot of graduates from IITs coming in, we should see the social composition of the IITs. Several people who crack the exam are those from rural backgrounds," Mishra said. "Especially after the Mandal Commission report was implemented, the bureaucracy has only turned more representative." Even the lowest rung in the societal ladder can aspire to join IAS (without the language barrier), become a District Magistrate, rise up the ladder and so on. Recent case of Ansar Shaikh a son of an auto driver becoming the youngest IAS officer (2016) in the first attempt is equally inspiring.² So is the case of Vijay Amruta Kulange, Daily Wager's Son Who Became IAS Officer (2012) in First Attempt. Vijay's first posting as an IAS officer was in Odisha's Dhenkanal district. Today, he lives with his proud parents and continues to work proactively towards transforming Odisha.³ There are many such examples of the non-elite entering in the IAS. These are developments to be genuinely proud of.

2.4 **Elitist Club and the pecking order:** Why is it that there is an alleged perception (presumably recent) only for the IAS being an "elitist" service? Does the erstwhile non-elite aspirant suddenly transform, after entry into IAS to become elite, self-serving, lose touch with reality, wallow in their newly found privileges and social status all in one go? Is this then the case of the "*cessation of the successful*"? I do not hold this view. I have seen my colleagues mixing with the people discharging their duties mostly *not* in an arrogant way and being held in high esteem. It will be grossly unfair to say that once the non-elitist aspirants make it to the IAS, they somehow shed their roots and get transformed into elitist club? There may be "pecking order" even amongst different government services resulting into perceptions of elitism in varying degree. Elitism should not be equated with pride in oneself or one's service. All of us take pride in belonging to a particular prestigious institution. We are proud of our families and is natural. Even at the highest level, some Ministries or Departments are considered more "*glamorous*" and some only "*a run of the mill*".

2.5 Perception of the so called "elitism" is not the exclusive preserve of the IAS. In all spheres of society, there are such perceptions of inequality. In academia, there is elitism and

² <https://www.tv9marathi.com/national/become-the-son-of-an-auto-driver-read-the-inspiring-story-of-ansar-sheikh-the-youngest-ias-officer-in-india-au130-701202.html>

³ <https://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/vijay-amruta-ias-tailor-daily-wager-569298.html>

pecking order amongst the institutions say IITs, IIMs and other prestigious institutions. IIT and IIM graduates are considered elitists in the sense of coming from an elite club. For many, there is even a kind of pecking order in different IITs at least in respect of certain subjects. So are those who pass out from the hallowed portals of the IIMs or some prestigious Universities and institutions like the TIFR, IISc Bangalore or the TISS, only to name as pure illustrations considered elitist. Those passing out from prestigious Universities abroad have pecking order in the club of elitists. In medical profession degrees like MRCP, FRCS and so on has a kind of prestige associated with elitism. In legal profession too, there is sometimes pecking order as to which institution one has graduated from. Such examples can be multiplied, but I guess, the reader gets the gist. Finally, at any rate, getting into a government service and that too in a reasonably well paying and permanent bureaucracy, in itself, has long been perceived as elitist and is not a new phenomenon peculiar only to the IAS as Dr. Subba Rao would lead us to believe.

Pedigree?

2.6 Only recently I came across a book *"Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs"*, March 22, 2016, by sociologist Lauren Rivera who looks into the recruitment practices in elite law, banking, and consulting firms. This makes an interesting reading. According to the author, *"Contrary to our national lore, the chances of ascending from meagre beginnings to affluence are slim"* This finding is inapplicable to the IAS where family background or which (elite) school or college you attended has practically no influence on selection into IAS. So, elitism of the family or school or college is not important. Privilege of entering into IAS is not passed on so consistently from one generation to the next. It is thus difficult to conclude that those who were non-elitists at the point of getting inducted into IAS, suddenly turned into elitists thereafter. Perceptions are important no doubt, but to make sweeping generalisations based only thereon seem facile.

3. Reforms towards Meritocracy:

3.1 **To blame or Not to Blame, the Blame Game?** Dr. Subba Rao in his TOI article feels that *"it's not all politicians' fault. The service rewards mediocrity & risk aversion"*. As a different perspective, Dr. Naresh Chandra Saxena (IAS 1964, UP cadre), eight years including being its Director at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Member Planning Commission amongst others, remarks in his book *"What Ails the IAS and Why it Fails to Deliver"* observes *"In the ultimate analysis, it appears that stand-alone bureaucratic initiatives have little lasting value unless supported by strong political ownership"*. Article by Deepak Gupta, (IAS 1974) and former Chairman UPSC *"Has IAS failed the nation? Not really: Critiques of the service should also recognise its immense strengths & many constraints"* in

Times of India, April 6, 2022⁴ has dealt with this issue (especially the report of the World Bank in 2006-07 on the reforms and on empowering the IAS by the politicians). He also points out that *"The article (of Dr. Subba Rao) also fails to recognise, on the one hand, that the service has followed the democratic principles of the primacy of the political executive, in the past and now and on the other, that politicisation has become much more entrenched and governance challenges more acute and complex"*. He further writes, *"When I wrote my book The Steel Frame: A History of the IAS (2019), I read a large number of articles on the IAS. Most were critical. Every policy or implementation failure seems to be laid for some reason at the door of the IAS. I then wondered whether all of India's problems will simply disappear if the IAS were to be abolished, as some critics were demanding"*.

Mercifully, Dr. Subba Rao hasn't gone that far (maybe yet).

3.2 Fortunately for the service, not many continue to play this blame game for long. Admittedly, some may have felt, from time to time, constrained by the "interference" by the political executive, or their "unjust" demands or by the lack of support by their superiors (both for the cause or not standing up to the obstructionist politician). Over time, either through sane counsel by their superiors or their own perspicacious observation, they have come to realise however, that there is a subtle distinction between "adjustment" (or what Anil Swarup calls accommodation⁵) and "compromise". Public administration like politics is also the "art of the possible" (not recognizing this will indeed be self-deception) and the best should not be the enemy of the good. This is especially true in a complex social milieu in which both the political executive and the administrative apparatus have to co-exist and as far as practicable, harmoniously operate. From my personal experience, the politicians often have better perception and knowledge of ground realities, a kind of sixth sense honed through years of peoples' contacts than that of a civil servant. Yet, as we all know, a request (or even demand) from a politician is regarded as interference or pressure, while that from a fellow officer is just "putting in a word". What is also equally true is that many times bureaucratic initiatives would have been stymied but for full support of the politician. I as well my colleagues have had many such experiences too numerous to enumerate.

3.3 **Rewarding mediocrity?:** Without going into the details of the management of cadre structure of the IAS or for that matter other All India Services and other civil services (including the Central Secretariate Service, the backbone of the Secretarial Services at the Central Secretariat), in my own experience (as Additional Secretary Department of Personnel

⁴ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-edit-page/has-ias-failed-the-nation-not-really-critiques-of-the-service-should-also-recognise-its-immense-strengths-many-constraints/>

⁵ "Why the IAS, again?", TheDailyGuardian <https://thedailyguardian.com/why-the-ias-again/>

and Training), the system of "empanelment" to senior echelons of the governmental hierarchy (Joint Secretaries, Additional Secretaries and finally the Secretaries) is the system of "dis-empanelment" and a process of *weeding out*. Secondly, it is not restricted only to IAS but to all the Group A civil services. A fair percentage from the zone of consideration gets weeded out based on the review by a committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary, despite a large number of officers presumably having "outstanding" confidential records. There may be many lacunas in this system (the "Noise" and "Bias" mentioned by Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman in his recent book "Noise") but obviously, selection to higher echelons in Central Government is not made out of mediocrity (at least if judged on the basis of confidential rolls).

Lateral Entry for meritocracy

3.4 Reforms for meritocracy and lateral entry: Dr. Subba Rao has also rightly stated that "*IAS has to be reformed into a meritocracy*". Though in his TOI article Mr. Subba Rao says that "How to go about that has to await another opinion piece" in his interview with Karan Thapar he gives some suggestions. According to him it is (a) proper system of lateral entry based on examinations and requiring every lateral entrant to spend five years of his first 10 years in field postings. (b) IAS officers, who spend their initial years as generalists, must acquire specialist domain knowledge, adding that "*specialisation need not be mandatory and that what one needs is a mixture of specialists and generalists*".

3.5 His second suggestion (b) is unexceptionable. Leaving aside the false antithesis that generalist also specialises in general administration (also called "Management" Science, many most prestigious universities have dedicated schools for "*government*", "*Public Administration*", "*Public Policy*" or for that matter "*Management Information Systems*"), specialists need generalists and vice versa. I shall have an occasion to revert to these two common personality types in connection with hedgehogs and foxes. This is a great simple model of trait differences between people, one with many foresight implications⁶. Strong incentives to acquire specialist domain knowledge has been already in vogue for the civil services for a quite number of years in the form of grant of non-mandatory full pay study leave of up to two years. Many of us have also upgraded our knowledge and skills and have acquired further degrees, including PhDs from prestigious universities both here and abroad, as well as short term mid-career compulsory training in institutions like IIMs, Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) Management Development Institute (MDI-Gurgaon), Tata Management Centre (TMC-Pune) and a host of similar institutions. Some who have acquired professional degrees in Management, finance or urban planning after getting selected to

⁶ <https://www.foresightguide.com/hedgehogs-and-foxes-two-personality-types>

top-notch MBA schools on their own initiative, have left IAS to take up assignments in academia, multilateral or private agencies (Indian Express Oct 17, 2006, "For Govt, IAS, IPS and a Harvard MBA don't mix")⁷ The article gives names of those who have left as well as the one who came back. Similarly, article in BusinessToday, (Oct 26, 2014 titled "*Bureaucrats prefer MBA degree for better career prospects*")⁸ mentions that "*Indeed, a small but growing number of bureaucrats also have an MBA degree. This trend has been discernible for at least over a decade now*". So, it is difficult to agree with his observation that "*there is no motivation for officers to upgrade their knowledge and skills*".

3.6 **Lateral entry:** I am however not so sure of the mechanics of the first suggestion (a) that of lateral entry that seems to imply a fairly long innings of the lateral entrant in the government service. This is an important subject for reform, and I have given a more detailed account thereof. He has suggested examination for lateral entrants, yet in another context he has lamented that "*The standard scapegoats are the recruitment examination, the induction training and subsequent in-service training.*" UPSC's selection process is not a spur of the moment decision and has been evolving over time. Selection through UPSC is a multi-layered system of two examinations and interview and is based on *not* how well you do but how badly others do.

3.7 UPSC has, since 2010 evolved its pattern of examinations ten times. The Statements of Mr. Satyanand Mishra, the then Secretary Personnel, have been referred to above. It may be argued (and perhaps rightly so), that entrance examinations are not necessarily a test or measure of administrative or managerial competence or merit or ability and excellence in the former is not *ipso facto* a guarantor of the latter or *vice versa*. However, one of the findings of a study by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace titled "THE INDIAN ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE MEETS BIG DATA" (Milan Vaishnav, Sept 2016) is that "*For officers early in their careers, exam scores and education are highly predictive of future success*". The selection through written examination is what Daniel Kahneman in his book "Noise" as a "*predictive*" judgement and an interview as an "*evaluative*" judgment. Despite all the "noise" and "bias" associated in both, however, in the absence of any other "objective metric" one needs to fall back on it. So perhaps Dr. Subba Rao is implying a better system of examination for the lateral entrants. His logic is that (Time Stamp 28:51) "*a dozen officers in the vast ocean not going to make a difference. They're not going to make a difference at the macro level, the system is going to militate against them. They won't be accepted*" (emphasis

⁷ <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/for-govt-ias-ips-and-a-harvard-mba-don-t-mix/14786/>

⁸ <https://www.businesstoday.in/specials/best-b-schools-2014/story/iit-kanpur-iim-lucknow-civil-services-examination-oxford-universitys-said-business-school-141290-2014-10-21>

added).

3.8 I do not know the basis of this assertion. Most of us have worked alongside subject matter specialists in relatively technical Ministries like Telecom, Information Technology, Forest, Environment, Bio-technology to name a few. I for one have never felt uncomfortable in working with them. His *"much more radical solution, is that the recruitment to the IAS must take this in two streams. One is at the entry career level as it happens of the group of 23 to 28 or whatever, and the second at mid-career level, both through open competitive exam so that these people who in the IAS now accept the others because they've been sanctified by an open competitive exam."* If this examination for lateral entrants is different from the main civil services examination, the "regular" IAS officers could still view such an examination to be easier and still consider the lateral entrants as backdoor entrants. But this also begs the question, why can't that better system of examination for mid-career lateral entrants be applied to the regular aspirants to the civil services (including IAS) to start with? Baptism by entrance examination need to be the same for everyone.

3.9 As per the anecdotal example given by him, the CM felt a percentage of 25% that he can depend on to get all his work done to be grossly inadequate. What then should it be? By their very nature, the lateral entry specialists are supposed to *"hit the ground running"* and consequently are of an advanced age (experience of 15 years or so). It is thus unclear to me how these lateral entrants will first pass an examination and then further undergo *"field"* training for five years. As to the suggestion of Dr. Subba Rao that once the specialists *"have been sanctified by an open competitive exam, the IAS will accept them in their fold"*. (Time Stamp 29.33) this is analogous to the method of *"emergency recruitment"* into IAS (again with process of selection) where the label of *"emergency recruit"* remained with the officers for a long time and were regarded as backdoor entry. It is a different matter that they rose high in the echelons of service, a rise that not unoften was attributed to the imputed seniority for service (usually 4 years or so) in the armed forces, though this was, more often than not purely a calumny.

3.10 I have included civil services because in the higher echelons, there is no reservation per se only for IAS and all the Group A services compete for what is known as *"empanelment"* mentioned above. If one examines the issue of the *"lateral entrants"* into the higher echelons of the government, the picture becomes starker. The salary band offered to the lateral entrants in the Central Government (this used to be at the level of Joint Secretaries, but this has now been lowered to that of Director and even Deputy Secretary levels) is not a secret as it forms part of the UPSC advertisement and is approximate gross salary of around Rs 2,21,000. With lateral entrants with 15 years of successful service in

private sector this is *significantly lower* than what they would be drawing in the private sector (sometimes more by many orders of magnitude). Cynically, could it be that the lateral entrants see many opportunities (to succumb) in civil services as referred to above by as Dr. Subba Rao in his "*thought experiment*" comparing IAS with Professor. Lastly, on his suggestion of lateral entry, there is no a-priori guarantee that such a lateral entrant does not, over time, catch the same viruses of complacency, acquiescence, turn lazy and cynical, and worse, lose their moral compass as, according to Dr. Subba Rao has, of late, afflicted the IAS.

Contracting Specialist Services

3.11 Contracting specialised services for specialised jobs, is a system in operation for quite a long time. There are detailed guidelines on this issue. The Government has been routinely manning some of the senior most positions in the government like Secretaries, Dy. Chairman Planning Commission (now NITI Aayog), RBI, many Chief Economic Advisors (CEA) like Dr. Kaushik Basu, Arvind Subramanian etc. from the market, to name only a few. Last year, an Ayurveda physician, 'Vaidya' Rajesh Kotecha, was appointed Special Secretary in the Ayush Ministry. The appointment of Prasara Bharati CEO Shashi Shekhar Vempati is yet another example. Dr. Naresh Chandra Saxena has given many more such examples. In his piece ("*IAS not really threatened by lateral recruitment of Joint Secretary officers*", National Herald, June 17, 2018⁹) and its full version Commentary in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 53, Issue No. 25, 23 Jun 2018, updated on 25 June 2018¹⁰, titled, "*Has the IAS Failed the Nation? An Insider's View*" he had stated that, "*In the past too, experts had been inducted at senior positions in government, generally without any advertisement. Many of them, such as Manmohan Singh, Bimal Jalan, Lovraj Kumar, Vijay Kelkar, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Rakesh Mohan, Jairam Ramesh, and Arvind Subramanian made a very good impact and contributed substantially in senior positions... Nor was the regime criticised for recruiting party friendly professionals. Russi Mody from the Tata Group headed Air India back in 1993 and, in 2002, former Bombay Suburban Electric Supply (BSES) Chairperson and Managing Director (CMD) R V Shahi was made the power secretary for five years.*". He also added that "*Thus, the experiment of inducting outsiders in government is not new. The second Administrative Reforms Commission too had recommended lateral entry at senior positions. It is likely that some of the joint secretaries who would be recruited through the new process are already working as consultants in the same ministry*". This is not surprising as the Prime Minister was desirous that such lateral entrants should "*hit the ground running*".

3.12 Furthermore, the Hon Prime Minister has also already caused to be put in place a

⁹ <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/opinion/the-ias-is-not-really-threatened>

¹⁰ <https://www.epw.in/journal/2018/25/commentary/has-ias-failed-nation.html>

system of *lateral entry* at the level of Joint Secretaries with specialised knowledge in relevant areas in designated Ministries like Economic Affairs, Civil Aviation, Revenue etc through a *formal* interview through UPSC. The selection method of the lateral entrants is different from the normal one. For example, reservation or caste-based quotas do not apply to these recruitments. There was a question in Lok Sabha if lateral entry into the administrative service is likely to reduce the number of reserved posts, and on March 24, 2021, Personnel Minister Jitendra Singh replied that it is not so because, *"Each post being filled is a single post in a specific domain area, (emphasis added) and the candidates are either to be appointed on contract basis or those from State Governments, Union Territories, Public Sector Undertakings, Autonomous Bodies, Statutory Bodies, Universities etc. on deputation basis (including short term contract), who would retain lien in their parent Departments. As such, there is no question of any reduction in reserved posts for SCs, STs, and OBCs."*

3.13 First batch was supposed to be of 10 such lateral entrants in various ministries (2018-19). I was one of the few members of the service to genuinely support this initiative. I have been a member of such an interview panel for Civil Aviation. Though we had a large number of applications (if my memory serves me right, about 6,000 for 10 vacancies and roughly a tenth for Civil Aviation), a preponderantly large number was either from other public sector streams or some from the academia. Three years later, India Today filed a Right to Information (RTI) request (on 8th July 2021,) with the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) about any assessment been done about their work in the government. From the DoPT's reply it is clear that of against the decision to appoint 10 posts of Joint Secretaries during 2018-19, eight joint secretaries were appointed in September 2019 in respective ministries/departments. Out of these, seven are in position at present. It will also be instructive to examine how many lateral entry Joint Secretaries exercised the option of an extension of 2 years provided in the scheme. Most recently DoPT requested the UPSC on 14.12.2020 and 12.02.2021 to select suitable persons to join the Government. UPSC has recommended 31 names to the Department of Personnel & Training (DoP&T) for different senior-level posts across ministries on a contract basis or deputation. Of these 31 candidates, there are three joint secretaries (finance, Commerce and Industry and Agriculture), nine deputy secretaries and 19 directors. These officers would be handling secret matters like Cabinet Notes and so on. I presume that these Lateral entrants would have the same requirements of oath of secrecy and cooling off period after the end of their term in the Government.

More number of lateral entrants required.

3.14 Dr. Subba Rao feels that *"a dozen or so officers are not going to make much difference"*. Well, one should also keep in mind that Civil servants (not necessarily from the

IAS) have worked in multilateral institutions like World Bank, IMF, UNDP, UNIDO, UNICEF, International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), ADB and a host of others and can thus be regarded as kind of specialist in their respective domains. Many others who have gone on study leave to prestigious institutions both in India and abroad, have taken specialized subjects and courses have won awards. Just as an example, Ankur Garg, (IIT Delhi, a civil service entrance topper 2002, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram and Union Territories (AGMUT) cadre), is studying International Development at Harvard, and achieved 171/170 in macroeconomics. He also got Raymond Vernon Award for Commitment to International Development. The award is given to a graduating student for dedication to international development, good citizenship, academic excellence and strong potential to lead and contribute to the field. He says, says it adds value 'because I was representing India at the top international university'. The Indian Economic Service (IES) is actually specialised in financial services. If additional outside expertise is considered necessary, a solution could be to increase this number and fix a kind of percentage, provided it does not militate against the normal reservation requirement, an issue that was already raised and replied as mentioned above.

3.15 There was another serious proposal of letting officers to go on secondment to private sector houses for a certain number of years to gain the private sector perspective, specialised skills. Government has been sending its officers to multilateral organisations like the World bank, WHO UNDP and so on for a certain number of years. The officers were supposed to go on secondment for a certain number of years (say 3 to 5 years) and return to government with improved skill set and specialisation. In fact, this proposal was quite analogous to the lateral entry proposal discussed above (albeit in a reverse manner). The proposal of secondment to private sector was not pursued further as it carried a real danger of the officer being considered a kind of "*mole*" of that private sector house when he/she returns to the government. (in contrast, UK allows such two-way traffic).

3.16 To my mind, one of the more doable ways of rewarding meritocracy is to supplant the current "*seniority cum merit*" with "*merit cum seniority*". The introduction by the Government of the system of "*deep diving*" into the multiple batches for selection for senior management is an effort in this direction viz. "*merit cum seniority*". However, deep diving is really deep (say even up to 10 levels) *and if it is also subject to the qualifying criteria of the required length of service*, the principle of merit cum seniority will be only half implemented.

3.17 I do believe, as also agreed to by Dr. Subba Rao (Time Stamp 29.52), that for an officer aspiring for higher positions in the Government, a firm grasp of ground realities in the

form of District Administration (District Magistrate or the Chief Executive Officer of Zilla Parishad) is absolutely necessary. That alone gives a rounded and grounded perspective to the officer. That is also the basis of getting IAS officers from the State Government to Centre and then sending them back after a certain number of years at the Centre. This is the kind of field training contemplated for the lateral entrants by Dr. Duvvuri Subba Rao. Secondly, I do not know if he also assumes that a lateral entrant chosen for one specialisation (say revenue) will continue only in that stream, because if he is transferred to say health, he would become a generalist to the field of health.

3.18 Regarding promoting mediocrity, Dr. Subba Rao has given an interesting example of a District Collector who was given the target to build 25,000 toilets giving two scenarios (Time Stamp 11:58). One where the Collector builds 25,000 toilets and completes her target. The second where having observed that only 10% of the 50,000 toilets built in the previous years are actually used. So, she goes about correcting the shortcomings in the remaining (90%) that as given by him could be the "bad design, bad implementation, the households not taken into consultation, there's no water connection or whatever. So, as she starts rectifying all this, she fails to meet the targets she builds only 10,000 instead 25,000, but she's not rewarded for building 10,000 effective products. On the contrary, she might get penalised". This is where the self-assessment report of the officer in which there is a specific item for highlighting the reason(s) that in the opinion of the officer resulted in a shortfall in meeting targets assumes relevance. It is also precisely in such situations that the assessment of the superior officer in assessing the totality of her work (of correcting shortcomings in 45,000 toilets + building new effective 10,000 ones) assumes significance. To come to the invariable conclusion that she will always be punished is perhaps not fair though arguably, it is just as well possible that the superior officer may regard not meeting the target in the interest of correcting past mistakes as a kind of loss of focus on the part of the implementing officer. It is here that the reported officer's self-assessment form of the that has specific item for reasons, that in his opinion led to shortfall in meeting the targets has especial relevance.

4. Competence, Meritocracy and its measurement

4.1 **Mediocrity and rewards, the measurement metric:** One hears a constant lament that mediocrity has crept in the IAS, and it has deteriorated in "competence". One of my senior colleagues also holds this view. No doubt all of us would like IAS to be more competent and not remain mediocre. Dr. Subba Rao in his interview (Time Stamp 26:03) gives his view of what he considers as meritocracy saying *"let's let me explain to you what I believe by in a meritocracy, the competent, all the competent and nobody, but the competent rises to the top. And everybody else falls by the baseline"* In the next sentence he admits that

"That's in an ideal world. In the real world, there is no perfect meritocracy, not just in India, but in anywhere around the world no perfect meritocracy. Even the most advanced and progressive organizations are struggling with performance evaluation, et cetera. If you read Daniel Kahneman book, Nobel Laureate, "Noise" he talks a lot about this, but the point is there is no perfect meritocracy, but regrettably, the IAS is far, far, far from being perfect in the Indian system".

4.2 Meritocracy: Is "it I know it when I see it": Before going any further, it would be necessary to ponder over the *measurement metric* of mediocrity, meritocracy or competence that one may have in mind and what constitutes a *"perfect meritocracy"*. Is the notion of meritocracy based on any objective measurable parameters? Or the notion is largely subjective like the famous 1964 quote (paraphrased for meritocracy, and with apologies) of United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart who remarked *"I know it when I see it"*. We live in a democracy. The political executive cutting across party lines and over time has relied heavily on the IAS. If indeed it was considered so mediocre and obstructionist, would not the IAS have been dismantled like the DGTD in the 91 wave of reforms? Apart from Government many IAS officers have proved their mettle by moving to the private sector, international organisations, academics and politics. Most recent example is the current Railways Minister who studied in Wharton and won on a BJP ticket in Odisha with the support of BJD. This is certainly not a manifestation of mediocrity. The political executive has, from time to time, selected IAS officers to head nearly all the regulatory bodies across different sectors. The Prime Minister inducted the ex-babus like R K Singh and Alphons (IAS); Hardeep Puri and S. Jayshankar (IFS) and Satyapal Singh (IPS) into his cabinet. Clearly, they wanted meritocracy and *"they knew it when they saw it"*.

4.3 If one were to say that the IAS is not perfect, (and no one, even its staunchest supporters are making any such claim), no one will quibble with it. But to state that it is *"far, far, far from being perfect"* it has a notion of an ordinal *distance* from perfection. Hence one should have a comparison benchmark (apart from and perhaps in addition to the confidential roll), something where if a score is 100, meritocracy will be called as perfect and so on. What are such benchmarks in the advanced and progressive *organisations*? Can we borrow from them and adapt? How and to what extent can we reduce the "Noise" of Kahneman? One should ideally have advanced *countries* preferably democracies because comparing with private organisations would not be entirely on all fours. Should each State have its own meritocracy metric? I am saying this because even in a much-maligned confidential roll system, it was found that over time, some States have been more than liberal in giving "outstanding" ratings (so their officers can have an edge in the empanelment process at the Centre) while others were conservative and generally gave "Very Good"

rating. So, at the time of empanelment, these trends across States were, so to say "normalised". If there is a metric for meritocracy, such a metric would be most welcome as it will help in measuring alleged deterioration (and the extent thereof) of IAS over time as well as across other Group A services. I am not aware of such a specific metric except the confidential rolls that are fairly detailed and the World Bank, "*Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)*"¹¹ that seem to be too broad for our purpose. Even here, as Shantayanan Devarajan has pointed out (Two Comments on "Governance Indicators: Where Are We, Where Should We Be Going?" by Daniel Kaufmann and Aart Kraay¹²), "*The WGI have produced some seemingly anomalous results (India, for instance, ranks in the bottom quartile worldwide on "political stability and lack of violence"*"¹³)

4.4 Or is the assessment of mediocrity of IAS subjective with an implicit underlying assumption that *IAS should be holding the beacon for others and the Nation*? Interestingly, this beacon thought was explicitly spelt out by one of my senior colleagues. Even so the metric of any objective measurement cannot be wished away (how high should the beacon be). The Carnegie Endowment for International Development Study (IAS Meets Big Data Milan Vaishnav, 2016) draws our attention to: "*Although there is no shortage of opinions on what ails the IAS or what fixes should be implemented, there has been a surprising paucity of hard data on its ranks and their performance. Bureaucratic activities in India are conducted concurrently at the district, state, and central levels with striking variation in the degree of efficiency at each level—not to mention wide variation across geographies.*" Its sequel (2019), "*Transforming State Capacity in India*"¹⁴ has more recent material and interesting cross references." Seemingly, each level and each State have their own "pug marks"¹⁵ of efficiency.

4.5 **Increasing competence:** As regards competence, Dr. Subba Rao's comparison "*is the IAS as competent as it used to be? I must say again that it's not as competent as it should be, or as it used to be*" it begs again the question of measurement against an objective yardstick. Purely from the academic background of the entrants, modern IAS aspirants would appear to be more qualified in diverse areas (IITs, higher engineering degrees, IIMs and other Management institutions, doctors etc) than their older counterparts. One of the findings of

¹¹ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1682130

¹² <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40282356>

¹³ S. Devarajan also notes, "*This result may not be as anomalous as it appears at first blush; however, according to the Indian prime minister, 170 of 602 districts have a significant Naxalite (Maoist) presence- "PM's Reply in Rajya Sabha to the Debate on Motion of Thanks to the President's Address." March 11, New Delhi.*" Clearly the WGI may not be suitable metric for what we need here.

¹⁴ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/07/02/transforming-state-capacity-in-india-pub-79411> Milan Vaishnav, has data on *lateral entry* into government, India's governance institutions.

¹⁵ I owe this term to my senior colleague Mr. P. C. Nayak

the study *"The Indian Administrative Service Meets Big Data"* by Carnegie Endowment for international Peace, Milan Vaishnav (2016) is that *"While initial characteristics heavily shape career trajectories, in the long term, there are clear rewards for officers who systematically invest in training or acquire specialized skills"*. If we see the educational qualifications and backgrounds of the secretary-rank IAS officers in the government, one cannot fail to notice that many of them have obtained higher educational qualifications (including professional ones) than what they had at the entry level in the IAS¹⁶ showing conscious efforts of self-improvement. This conforms to the observation of Karan Thapar (Time Stamp 31:57) that *"IAS officers, who spend their initial years as generalists, must acquire specialist domain knowledge"*. Dr. Subba Rao indirectly agreed with this observation asking (Time Stamp 31:57) *"the specialist versus general debate is all over in every bureaucratic system that I've worked in. That debate is there, how do you manage tension between breadth and depth? When should people start specializing? But there's an important difference here between the private sector and the IAS. In the private sector for example, people typically start in a specialized job and then rise become generalists."*

4.6 Giving the example of Chandrasekharan, the venerable Chairman of Tata sons, he said "He started as a specialist in TCS, grew up the ladder (finally becoming the Executive Chairman Tata Sons, a generalist job). According to Dr. Subba Rao, *"what happens in the IAS is the inverse of that. People start as generalists and then specialists. And I think there's much to be said for both systems"*. One may however note that most of the IIM graduates (even IITians and then IIMs) also first enter private sector in management positions (of a generalist, including, as I understand, the Tata Administrative Service) and is quite similar to the appointments of IITians, IIMs in the IAS. Dr. Subba Rao further observed, *"but as far as some people remaining generalists, philosopher Isaiah Berlin would say societies need both hedgehogs and foxes"*¹⁷. *A hedgehog is one which knows a little about a lot of things. Foxes one who knows a lot about a very few things. Hedgehogs are the big ideas; foxes are the nuanced people who can implement them. So, society need hedgehogs and foxes. The IAS needs hedgehogs and foxes"*, effectively saying that IAS needs both specialists and generalists.

4.7 It may also be noted that out of the total of 81 secretaries in the government of India, 57 belong to the IAS, while the rest belong to other services. If one goes by the

¹⁶ <https://theprint.in/india/governance/any-connection-between-the-education-of-top-ias-officers-and-jobs-they-do-is-purely-coincidental/70161/>

¹⁷ In 1953, philosopher Isaiah Berlin wrote a short essay *"The Hedgehog and the Fox"*, about two common personality types. He based it on a quote attributed to the Greek poet Archilochus, "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing."

entries in the confidential rolls, a far higher percentage have "outstanding" than earlier officers. It is no use arguing that "outstanding" entries are now given too liberally. Can a counter argument be made that the officers are indeed getting more, well, outstanding, though whether these characteristics qualify for higher competence of the IAS officers, could be debatable. But at least these are the facts on the table.

Competence Index, KRA and KPI

4.8 **KRA and KPA:** As regards quantifying competence, Mr. Gaurav Choudhury talks about "*Enterprise and innovation flourishes in an atmosphere that stokes free-thinking, and rewards lateral thinking*" in his article "Foster innovative thinking in the IAS by defining KPIs, KRAs by Gaurav Choudhury, March 28, 2022¹⁸". In my earlier writing on Dr Subba Rao's observation of IAS being a service with deeply flawed system of incentives and penalties, I have pointed out that the Government of India has since 2006 already instituted a system of rewarding officers at different levels for innovation and out of the box thinking in the delivery of public service.

4.9 In this context, Mr. Gaurav Choudhury's suggestion of defining key performance indicators (KPIs) and key result (or responsibility) areas (KRAs), has considerable merit. Something along these lines was attempted way back by one of our very senior cadre mate Dr. V Srinivasan who as a Health Secretary. He instituted a framework of "Key Factor Analysis (KFA)" for medical personnel to measure performance. Over time more and more factors got added, some primary and some secondary, the total number of which became very large. The system worked for some time as long as he was there but after his deputation to the World Bank but fell into disuse. Since this is an important metric, it needs elaboration.

4.10 **Competence Index:** Effectively, what is being suggested can be said to be building blocks of a "competence Index". In the government (including the IAS), there is a "self-assessment" by the officer. This part of the confidential form is quite detailed and gives many factors or target that the officer was supposed to perform (something along the lines of KPI or KRA) and how he fulfilled them, and if there has been any shortfall, what were the reasons, in his view for such a shortfall.

4.11 In the context of public administration, the officer goes through multiple jobs. Obviously, each job will need to have its own KRAs and KPIs. If this can be objectively designed for at least some of the civil services (building up a kind of competence index), this could be a good starting point both for cross sectional and time series analysis of competence. It may throw at least some qualitative light on how a particular service

¹⁸ <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/opinion/foster-innovative-thinking-in-the-ias-by-defining-kpis-kras-8284671.html>

compares with its peers at a given point of time and also how the competence of that service moves over time. This exercise will also involve giving relative weights (though inherently subjective) to different KRAs or KPIs if one desires to compute such a competence index. Further complicating the system is the frequency of transfers normally within two years if lucky. Such transfers are often at the behest or insistence of the political executives including the MLAs, MPs, the district minister and finally the CM, who in normal course will invariably side with the political functionaries even if he knows the DM or CEO to be correct. So, keeping the political functionary in reasonably good humour becomes a part of the new KRA or KFA. at the lower rungs of the district administration (District Magistrates, CEOs of Zilla Parishads) for whom Mr. Choudhury assumes to have a "*clear annual and three-year development and other goals on which their performance will be measured*", even assuming for sake of argument that these goals do have a three-year time horizon for achievement. Moreover, the benefits (fruits) of innovation started by a particular DM or CEO but having been transferred midway, would be reaped by his successor (who may or not be deserving of them). I am also unclear how this alone will "*Foster innovative thinking in the IAS*" that is a part of his heading of the article. This is because as he says, "*the fear of losing if targets aren't met inspires innovation in the corporate world — something that doesn't come about in a structure of 'time bound' promotions and wage increments*". For one thing, as I understand private sector has time bound (what are called "rolling") promotions up to a certain level. Secondly, as has been mentioned above, beyond a certain level, the promotions in the civil services are not time bound. Wage increments can get affected by adverse entries in the confidential roll of the officer. Hire and fire of private sector is not implementable in the public sector in general and yearly wage increments are also a part of the wage structure in the private sector.

4.12 To give the analogy given by Dr. Subba Rao towards the end of his interview (Time Stamp 31.53), "*Societies need both hedgehogs and foxes. A hedgehog is one who knows a little about a lot of things. A fox is one who knows a lot about a very few things. Hedgehogs is the big idea people. A fox is the nuanced people who can implemented them.*" Hence a lateral entrant cannot be transferred to another stream because then a fox would become a hedgehog (or is it the other way round?¹⁹). If lateral entrants are going to form distinct and separate silos or cadres, (there may be a need to be one for each specialisation, I guess), issues of "fitment" initially in each of the silo as well as their promotions in the specialised

¹⁹ The Greek poet Archilochus wrote, "the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing", According the psychologist Phil Tetlock, "The hedgehogs are more the big idea people, more decisive. In most MBA programs, they'd probably be viewed as better leadership material," See for example at: <https://www.npr.org/2019/07/08/739502013/the-fox-and-the-hedgehog-a-story-of-triumphs-and-tragedy>

cadre would also be important. Further is the issue of their cadre management, who writes their CRs (is it the Additional Secretary if there is one, or straight the Secretary who would in all probability be a generalist). The current system of lateral entry for a certain number of years avoids most of these problems. A change will be most welcome if the above issues are first identified and addressed. A lot of work goes into creating a new cadre.

4.13 Notably, the UPSC advertisement gives separate essential qualifications and job description for *each* of the post so advertised²⁰. Interestingly enough, the initial appointment for a period of 3 years (Extendable to 5 years depending upon performance. The total period of an empanelled Joint Secretary in Government of India is 5 years and for Director 4 years, after which they have to revert to their respective cadres or parent department. For lateral entrant Director, this can now be for 5 years *but depending on performance*. Again, we have not escaped from the same allegedly faulty appraisal system rewarding mediocrity over meritocracy that is so abhorrent! Furthermore, an IAS officer coming to Centre as Director will need to revert back after 4 years (unless in the meantime promoted as Joint Secretary through the same allegedly faulty system of appraisal) but the lateral entrant can continue for 5 years.

5. Risk Aversion, Corruption: "the termite that hollows the country."

5.1 **Risk Aversion:** Prime Minister said corruption is like a "termite" which makes the country hollow, and all the people of the country have to work together to rid the nation of it as soon as possible. The issue of risk aversion is more subtle and is also linked to corrupt practices. Corruption is in itself a vast subject and perhaps worthy of a separate discussion and is referred to here *only in the light of its relevance to tendency towards risk aversion*. This is because in an environment of making multiple decisions many of them involving financial matters, taking risks involves making decisions on incomplete information. Such decisions may appear sub-optimal by hindsight in future. At any rate, one could say that corruption should be defined not merely as making money but also not doing the assigned job properly. A civil servant who does not make decision in time (without adequate reason and justification) is as corrupt as someone who does but makes money out of the decisions made.

5.2 The last point needs some amplification. No doubt, the Prime Minister has declared that he shall support "honest" decisions or honest mistakes and he means to do just that. The issue is who will first determine if a decision has been honest? Honest decision has an in-built element of decision made "*in good faith*", even glossing over, for the time being, the

²⁰ UPSC ADVERTISEMENT NO. 51/2021, https://www.upsc.gov.in/sites/default/files/Advt-No-51-2021-Engl_0.pdf

important differences in its interpretation in dictionary meaning and in the IPC. In the past, the first port of call would be the administrative ministry. After holding an enquiry, the Ministry can take whatever administrative disciplinary actions that need to be taken. If it feels there is some criminality, it can refer the case to CBI. Now, however, the first port of call is the CBI who will determine if the action should be taken by the administrative ministry or there is criminality. No doubt, the “truth” ultimately does (hopefully prevail), but not before and without destroying reputations and careers. Secondly, in the complex economic and social decision making, the proper assessment should be that of the administrative ministry who could have the “domain” knowledge. For example, *promoting competition is in itself a public purpose*. However, this can get easily obfuscated as a corrupt practice (as has sometimes happened) if waiver of some requirements is made in favour of a party for a specified time in the interest of promoting competition, though there is no hint of malfeasance or money trail. Similar is the case of a regulator where a traffic forecast proved (by hindsight) to be conservative and the (higher) regulated prices based thereon became generous and resulting what was perceived to be a windfall gain to the regulatee, though it was stipulated that the gain if any will be shared 50% with the government. The allegation was that the regulator had consciously depressed the forecast to allow for the windfall gain. No money trail was established. The Ministry’s support was of no avail and yet the entire board, (if my memory serves me right) was charge sheeted. Often enough, discretion used in favour of a party is regarded as a “proof” of a corrupt practice. Often, the officer (not necessarily the IAS) finds it prudent to tilt on the side of caution and leave the decision to be decided by the higher authorities or the courts instead, resulting in avoidable delay. There are many such instances too numerous to enumerate, but well the reader will get the gist.

Who moved my honesty?

5.3 Unlike in the players of the share market (bulls and bears?), there is no inherent DNA of risk aversion in the civil service and certainly not in the IAS. The Prime Minister has exhorted the IAS fraternity to make “bold” decisions to serve the people. By their very nature, bold decisions will involve some risks and taking responsibility therefor. Nobody ab initio wants to be the “*perfect bureaucrat*” of Brooks Atkinson who defined it thus: “*the perfect bureaucrat everywhere is the man who manages to make no decisions and escape all responsibility*”²¹. However, consistently and over time members of the service have realised that taking risks (even for a good cause) and making decisions in good faith is often fraught

²¹ “*Indian Civil Services: A bureaucracy must be an enabler and not a hinderer*” by Moin Qazi. He holds PhDs in English from Los Altos University and Economics from Nagpur University. He worked for over three decades with State Bank of India, as a grassroots field officer, program manager, policy maker, and researcher in development finance. <https://www.ummid.com/news/2018/July/08.07.2018/india-civil-servants-need-to-reinvent.html>

with personal dangers of visitations, and that too much later, by the various investigative agencies. The State will not protect you. Here the protection given by the statute (of requiring permission for prosecution by the political executive) is seldom (if at all) used lest the government be "perceived" as shielding the guilty. When honest competent officers are singled, years of reputation that is built on the faith that State will protect you demolished, then for the discerning, risk aversion inevitably creeps in. They wonder "*Who moved my honesty?*" out of the table. The Prevention of Corruption Act does not even have a clause to protect actions taken by the officers "*in good faith*". Contrast this with the "THE COAL MINES (SPECIAL PROVISIONS) ACT, 2015, ACT NO. 11 OF 2015, 30 March 2015²²" where in sec 28, there is express protection of action taken in "*good faith*". Absence of such a protection, to my mind, gives a kind of "*perverse incentives*" in favour of corruption (a kind of variant of the "cobra effect"). As the argument could go, if honest bonafide actions (mistakes, may be) do not have protection from PCA, let me be corrupt, at least I will have money to defend myself if and when caught. We have cases where honest IAS officers preferred to be in jail as they had no money to engage a lawyer to argue for bail in the courts. Dishonesty pays, it seems.

Mens Rea & the Law on Torts

5.4 I have long back suggested to introduce mens rea as an ingredient in PCA. Also, introduction of a well-structured "Law on Torts" in India (as prevalent in most Western democracies) will empower all, including civil servants from wrongful and malicious harassment. Since the final authority of such amendment rests with the political executive, they will have to shoulder the onus of honest officers being in the docks, or for that matter the tendency of risk aversion. Recent amendments to sec 13 of the PCA²³ do not go far enough. It talks about "*intention to perform or cause performance of public duty...*" and so on. Whether these wordings will be construed in the same way as "*mens rea*" or "*actions in good faith*" will itself be open for interpretation. It is also unclear why the Government was shy of using these "*terms of art*" that have substantial case law to interpret them. What good is to have a good honest reputation, receive Prime Minister's award for innovative public service delivery, and later be hauled up for a bonafide and honest mistake in a decision made in good faith, by the investigating agencies who do not respect past reputations and for whom all these past achievements count as zero in assessing a mistake?

Officer-Political Nexus, implications, and reform suggestions

5.5 "**Blame Game**" Revisited: I had briefly touched upon the malaise of corruption in the context of "risk aversion". Karan Thapar (Time Stamp 19:12) put a likely criticism that Dr.

²² <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2015-11.pdf>

²³ <https://www.egazette.nic.in/writerreaddata/2018/187644.pdf>

Subba Rao is "exonerating politicians. And instead, he is blaming the IAS for the problems the IAS suffers with". Dr. Subba Rao's response needs to be given in his words:

" I admit to that. it is self-serving for the IAS to blame politicians for the moral and intellectual decline of the IAS, this is the biggest democracy. Politicians will, of course dangle but why should civil servants fall? But they do indeed fall for it. And I tell you how the psychology operates. A minister asked me to do something irregular, I'm uncomfortable doing it, but the way I calculate is this, that if I actually comply with what he is saying nothing bad would happen to me. On the other hand, if I don't fall in line, if I don't, budge, somebody down the line, she's going to comply with this request. She's going to get ahead of me, why should I let that happen? When nothing bad will happen to me instead something good might happen.

So, the IAS by not cooperating, but not by not standing by collective IAS code conduct, collective ethics of service, collective values of service is self-constructing itself. We all cooperate, we have a collective optimal solution. We betray each other, we have a self-destructive solution., But instead of cooperating, we betray each other. We don't follow the service code of conduct. And this, you know, as people in operations research say, this is standard prison's dilemma. In fact, I must also say I was reading just this morning, Chief Justice Ramanna may have exactly this point in his Kohli Memorial lecture, that together, if officers, he was talking about the CBI police officers, but it applies to all top civil servants, including the is if you all stand together and collectively uphold the values and ethics of the service, the politicians cannot do anything. And that's the reason I say that it's not a politician to blame, but it's the civil servants themselves.

***And from his article in the TOI:** The truth is that no political system, no matter how venal, can corrupt a bureaucracy if it stands united and inflexibly committed to collective high standards of ethics and professional integrity. Sadly, that's not been the IAS story.*

5.6 Corruption is not *only* about making money. Chief Justice Ramanna was delivering the D. P. Kohli Memorial Lecture (April 1, 2022) on "*Democracy: Role and Responsibilities of Investigative Agencies*" and had some home truths for the proper functioning of the CBI saying that "*with the passage of time, like every other institution of repute, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had also come under deep public scrutiny. Its actions and inactions had raised questions regarding its credibility, in some cases*". However, Dr. Subba Rao's views on the officers standing up together are valid. But many a time superior officer fails to defend the actions of a charged subordinate for the apprehension of appearing to shield the "guilty", perhaps forgetting the underpinning of dictum of criminal jurisprudence of being innocent unless found guilty or worse, to escape the charge of criminal conspiracy. I shall comment on the illustrative parable mentioned by Dr. Subba Rao.

5.7 Unless it is also a kind of "*thought experiment*" (like a Professor and an IAS officer from same family), his example that even if an officer is uncomfortable with the requests or demands made by a Minister, he has the fear that if he does not fall in line, some other officer will and "*go ahead of him*" and "*why should I allow it to happen*", to my mind is facile on two counts. **First**, that is not, in my view, how the psychological anatomy operates. I say this because quite apart from the same request (or demand) put before two officers (one of them feeling uncomfortable but acquiescing for fear of FOMO because in his assessment some other officer would not feel so uncomfortable and comply with it presumably without qualms of conscience with the sole intention only to "go ahead"), the politician can and does present many such requests to many such (other) officers (who in his view are more "practical", "accommodative" "pliant" or with whatever other adjectives one may think of) and who may acquiesce in these requests, again for whatever reasons and still (presumably) go ahead of our officer and about which he can do nothing about.

5.8 **Secondly**, the example also assumes that all officers must have the same level of comfort in acquiescing or disagreeing to a particular demand (Fear of Missing Out-FOMO, or its cousin Fear of Losing Out-FOLO). Such an assumption is at best debatable and in turn crucially depends on the *nature of the demands and does not admit of generalisation*. Obviously, any illegal demand even if it is an order cannot be implemented and must be resisted. The subtle distinction between "adjustment" (or what Anil Swarup calls accommodation²⁴) and "compromise" has been pointed out above. However, remarks of Dr. Subba Rao raises other important matters.

5.9 Dr. Subba Rao has given a psychological justification of why many IAS officers follow the example of some individual officers with "weak moral fibre" thus: "I don't want to trivialise the challenge of political interference; in a democracy, it comes with the territory. But to blame politicians for the intellectual and moral decline of the IAS is self-serving. Politicians will of course dangle carrots but why should officers go for them? What happens though is that some individual officers with weak moral fabric succumb to the temptation and others follow suit, either attracted by the rewards or simply to save their careers." Apart from the fact that IAS as a class is not a group of sheep showing herd mentality, IAS is a permanent Civil Service. It is thus unclear why its members should follow others (with weak moral fibre) "simply to save their career". If they are indeed doing so, it can only mean that their careers are in some way "threatened" by not doing so, or the politician has some lever on them for their not so worthy past deeds as is mentioned in the next paragraph.

5.10 Coming back to the example given by Dr. Subba Rao, it is pertinent to ask, why should

²⁴ "Why the IAS, again?", TheDailyGuardian <https://theguardian.com/why-the-ias-again/>

an officer feel that if she does not fall in line, something bad will happen to her? It can only be if that officer has some other skeletons in her cupboard that the Minister knows about. No one is taking cudgels on behalf of such an officer. The deeper question is that, knowing skeleton in the cupboard of an officer, why did the politician allowed them to remain so, only to use them as a lever on the officer for future (unjust) demands? This is where according to me the liability (or to use a stronger words culpability or complicit) of the political class becomes apparent.

5.11 Politicians-IAS interactions and reforms: Some of the key findings and recommendations of the Study by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Milan Vaishnav) referred to above are

- i) "Political interference generates substantial inefficiency: the best officers do not always occupy important positions, while political loyalty offers bureaucrats an alternative path to career success.
- ii) Counterintuitively, greater political competition does not necessarily lead to better bureaucratic performance.
- iii) The central and state governments should pass and implement pending legislation that protects bureaucrats against politically motivated transfers and postings. Despite judicial prodding, most states have stalled on such moves."

5.12 The last suggestion is most welcome and unexceptionable but easier said than done. In an article "*How civil is India's civil service*", Moin Qazi observes, inter alia, that "*The IAS is hamstrung by political interference and outdated personnel procedures. The Government must adopt safeguards to promote accountability while protecting bureaucrats from political meddling*"²⁵ also referring to the quote of Ivor Jennings²⁶, the famous constitutional scholar who said in the context of describing how the British avoided politicising their bureaucracy (and therefore corruption), "*The intrusion of politics is the first step towards the intrusion of corruption*". At any rate this falls squarely within the domain of the political executive that cannot escape its responsibility, regardless of what is stated by Dr. Subba Rao that ". It will serve no one's purpose to deny that politicians do have a major role in these characteristics that ail not only the IAS but the Indian bureaucracy as a whole.

5.13 Some cures are suggested in the articles themselves. The two observations of Dr. Subba Rao in his article in TOI. According to him, "*IAS is a system that promotes mediocrity and risk aversion*" and that "*Yes, and it's not all politicians' fault*" are fertile subjects,

²⁵ <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2018/columnists/how-civil-is-indias-civil-service.html>

²⁶ According to Wikipedia, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru proposed him to be the Chairman of the drafting committee of the Constitution of India; however, eventually Mahatma Gandhi's candidate, B. R. Ambedkar, was chosen. He then served as constitutional adviser to the Government of Pakistan. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivor_Jennings

resulting in a large number of articles by academicians, public policy specialists, reform advisers as well as retired bureaucrats who write from “*insiders’ insights*”. It is neither possible nor necessary to take cognizance of all of them. Article by L. N. Venkataraman (TERI School of Advanced Studies, Economic and Political Weekly²⁷, 53, Issue No. 32, 11 Aug 2018, ISSN (Online) - 2349-8846)²⁸ “*Can Lateral Entry in the IAS Ensure Good Governance*”? gives some other good references. One such initiative is the simplification of processes as the British Prime Minister Theresa May’s observed “*We’re getting rid of bureaucracy so that we’re releasing time for police officers to be crime fighters and not form writers*” signifying reform of processes, reduce paperwork and quickening the pace of service delivery. Our very own Indian variant is “*too much analysis leads to paralysis*”. Second, enable the bureaucracy to make bold and quick decisions putting in a meaningful and workable framework capable of sifting through action “*in good faith*” and “*malafide actions*” and protecting the former, if the underlying is the public purpose and public good. May be an explicit mention like “*mens rea*” or “*money trail*” in the Prevention of Corruption Act would be a welcome step. The book “*Blink*” by Malcolm Gladwell has some useful material, though mostly from private sector. Third, is getting rid of bureaucracy from politics. The Prime Minister Mr. Modi has amended 46-year-old conduct rules (Aug 8, 2014) for top bureaucrats to include new provisions that now mandate that a civil servant shall maintain political neutrality and take decisions on merit alone. Eight years have now passed, time sufficient to see the palpable results. Seemingly, Dr. Subba Rao has failed to mention this reform probably because he does not see any tangible results thereof.

6. On Commitment and Credibility of IAS: two illustrative examples.

6.1 Dr Subba Rao has lamented that IAS had a “*formidable reputation for competence, commitment and integrity*”, but that’s “*unravelling*”. Today “*the IAS has lost its ethos and its way. Ineptitude, indifference and corruption have crept in*”. If people see an officer is committed, such an officer automatically commands credibility. Credibility thus needs to be earned. Another senior colleague of mine pointed out that there is that inscription on the high vault of the North/South Block that houses the Prime Minister's office and some of the important administrative ministries of Central Government in Delhi that says, “*liberty does not descend to a people; a people have to raise themselves to it*”. Much the same applies to credibility. Credibility does not descend to a people; people have to rise to it.

6.2 **Credibility:** One of the important elements of a people-oriented services is its credibility. Dr. Subba Rao gives two illustrative examples of how according to him, this

²⁷ <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/can-lateral-entry-in-ias-ensure-good-governance>

²⁸ https://www.academia.edu/37250837/Can_Lateral_Entry_in_the_IAS_Ensure_Good_Governance.pdf

credibility has got eroded over time. One is that of the British Prime Minister, *"It strikes me that Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the UK is currently being investigated for alleged 'party-gate' transgressions by the British equivalents of our cabinet secretary and the Delhi police. And not one member of the UK parliament, not even an opposition MP, has cast any doubt on the integrity of the probes. Such a thing happening in our system is unimaginable, and that's a reflection not of the low esteem in which our politicians are held but of the low esteem in which our bureaucracy is held"*.

6.3 His second example is about IAS officer probing a scam: *"In the mid-1970s when I was a fresh entrant into the service, if the government was being attacked by the opposition on a scam or a scandal, all that the CM had to do was to stand up in the Assembly and announce that he would appoint an IAS officer to inquire into the matter. That was enough to shut out the debate. Today if a CM said that she is likely to be booed"*.

6.4 All comparisons are odious and here too, on the first example of the UK Prime Minister, Avaya Shukla who retired from IAS in 200, in his piece *"Don't Blame The IAS, A Nation Gets The Civil Services It Deserves by Avay Shukla April 7, 2022"*²⁹, has attempted to give an account of the qualitative differences between the UK societal fabric as contrasted with the Indian one. As reported in the Indian Express (Oct 17, 2006³⁰), while civil services rule in the United Kingdom allows five-year *private deputation* for bureaucrats and vice-versa to promote *"cross-fertilisation"* of ideas, we do not do so in India restricting only one way flow from private sector into higher echelons of Central Government through direct appointments or now through *"lateral entry"*. As also remarked by another senior colleague of mine, *in its centenary year the BBC is still held in high esteem around the globe, and AIR or Doordarshan have all but faded away from the public broadcasting firmament*. Furthermore, Dr. Subba Rao's reference is only to the integrity of the probe not being questioned and not being a reflection on the political class *but only on the bureaucracy*. This in itself is an interesting because it can be legitimately asked, why a party in a lockdown? Though it is unclear, hopefully the British bureaucracy had not arranged it to ingratiate themselves to the Prime Minister. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has offered what he said was a "wholehearted" apology for attending surprise birthday gathering in his honour on the afternoon of June 19, 2020, in the Cabinet Room at Number 10, saying however that it *"did not occur to me that the birthday gathering, complete with a cake, was a party*. Similarly, the Chancellor of Exchequer (Finance Minister) Rishi Sunak also apologised. Both have paid fines. Regarding bureaucracy, as a matter for record, the Cabinet Secretary Simon Case, who was

²⁹ <https://hillpost.in/2022/04/dont-blame-the-ias-a-nation-gets-the-civil-services-it-deserves/117274/>

³⁰ <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/for-govt-ias-ips-and-a-harvard-mba-don-t-mix/14786/>

first asked by the British Prime Minister to investigate whether COVID-19 restrictions were broken, stepped back from the inquiry on 17 December amid reports that his own office had also held a party in December 2020. Responsibility for the inquiry was handed to Sue Gray (in May 2021 became Second Permanent Secretary in the Cabinet Office, reporting to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster)³¹. As regards reflection on bureaucracy, India has had instances of its former Prime Ministers being investigated and a few former Chief Ministers and a few former Cabinet Ministers put in jail.

6.5 On the second example, bureaucracy can also take some solace that in India we have witnessed the decision of the Supreme Court for penalty of death to certain terrorists being questioned (mostly, as I understand for political reasons) on grounds of its fairness. Similarly, appointment of a retired High Court Judge to probe a scam is often greeted with similar allegations of partisanship.

6.6 It is also worth noting that IAS have often been the only dependable trouble-shooters in appointments to head *private* institutions in testing times. Even in government, a Collector (or the District Magistrate) along with his colleague the SP command highest credibility especially in times of crisis. Collector is also the Chairman of the sensitive matters like Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act. This is because a general faith that these officers will normally be non-political (admittedly, there may be black sheep, but then where are they not?). Offices of top political functionaries are manned by a large number of IAS officers. The government has been appointing IAS officers in sensitive institutions like the CVC, CAG and the like.

6.7 Finally on the issue of reforms to meritocracy, it will be worthwhile to examine if, how and to what extent the tenets of the "*nudge theory*" of Richard Thaler can be applied³². But Dr. Subba Rao's observation that "*soon (IAS) becomes cogs in the wheels of complacency and acquiescence, turn lazy and cynical, and worse, lose their moral compass*" is far too sweepingly general and in my view not a fair assessment of the IAS. Were it not for the fact that Dr. Subba Rao has a clinical mind and one of the sharpest brains of our service, one may have termed his comments as a cop out.

Hedgehog, the Fox, the T-shaped people & Television debates

6.8 Stephen Jay Gould (of the Non-Overlapping Magisteria-NOMA in his book "*Rocks of Ages*") has written another book, "*The Hedgehog, the Fox, and the Magister's Pox*"

³¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partygate>

³² After all, "*The Behavioural Insights team*", popularly known as the "Nudge Unit", was established in the U.K Cabinet Office in 2010 by David Cameron's government to apply behavioural science to public policy. Now owned partly by the Cabinet Office, by Nesta and by employees, it has operations across the world.

(Harmony Books 2003) with subtitle "*Mending Gap Between Science and Humanities*", wherein he emphatically does not claim that one of the two great ways (either science or the humanities) works like the fox, and the other like the hedgehog. On the contrary, he says "*I use the fox and hedgehog as my model for how the sciences and humanities should interact because I believe that neither pure strategy can work, but that a fruitful union of these seemingly polar opposites can, with goodwill and significant self-restraint on both sides, be conjoined into a diverse but common enterprise of unity and power*".

6.9 This has also been the theme of an article "*Foxes Vs. Hedgehogs: Making T-Shaped People*"^{33 34 35}. wherein it is stated that "*As a result, the smartest option is the middle ground: the generalizing specialist. It's a person who has deep skills in one area, but who can apply knowledge from other areas of expertise, too. These kinds of thinkers are also often called T-shaped people, reflecting their ability to dive deep in one area (the vertical bar of the T), while also covering a broad range of topics at a lower level (the horizontal bar across the top of the letter³⁶). T-shaped people have made significant contributions throughout history. Leonardo da Vinci was a great artist, but much of his art was shaped by his meddling in science, music and other areas. Likewise, Shakespeare was once called "an absolute Johannes factotum," or, in common language, a jack of all trades.*

6.10 **IAS as the T Officers:** I came across an interesting (though somewhat deprecating to specialists) quote "*Specialization is for insects*," from the science fiction author Robert A. Heinlein His character Lazarus Long in the novel "*Time Enough for Love*" provides a list of requirements for a competent man... "*A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly.*" That's indeed a tall order. Surely Dr. Subba Rao does not have the likes of Lazarus Long in his exhortations for competency. But Heinlein's ideal of wide-ranging competency is an excellent goal, however imperfectly any of us might achieve it. I felt that there's a life lesson to take away from this idea of a competent man as having multiple skills rather than being a limited man. I would regard persons capable of achieving such a synthesis as the "T people" or the *generalising specialist*. Dr. Subba Rao

³³ <https://www.adexchanger.com/ad-exchange-news/foxes-vs-hedgehogs-making-t-shaped-people/>

³⁴ <https://www.mediacomblink.com/foxes-vs-hedgehogs>

³⁵ <https://www.foresightguide.com/hedgehogs-and-foxes-two-personality-types> Gives good cartoon of Two Valuable Organizational Types; Hedgehog and the Fox by Suzie Brown, at InnovaTribe, 2011

³⁶ It would seem that the foxes are the *horizontal bar* across the top of the letter T and hedgehogs the *vertical bar*.

may probably be referring to this (Time Stamp 31:57) when he spoke about *managing tension between breadth and depth*. IAS can be called a system integrators or assessors, or verily, the T Officers, many of whom have made substantial contribution to Nation Building, Dr. Subba Rao being one such example.

6.11 I have gone very carefully through the article of Dr. Subba Rao as well as Karan Thapar's interview that he conducted both masterly and masterfully as has been his wont. I have always admired his crisp comments. On a purely lighter vein however (not in any way even hinting that this applies to the present discussion), I also came across an observation in Daniel Kahneman's book "*Thinking: Fast and Slow*" page 220 where he presents the characteristics of Hedgehog and a Fox as given by Tetlock who uses the terminology from Isaiah Berlin's essay on Tolstoy, "*The Hedgehog and the Fox*." About hedgehogs, Kahneman says, inter alia, they are

"(Hedgehogs) are opinionated and clear, which is exactly what television producers love to see on programs. Two hedgehogs on different sides of an issue, each attacking the idiotic ideas of the adversary, make for a good show...

Foxes, by contrast, are complex thinkers. They don't believe that one big thing drives the march of history (for example, they are unlikely to accept the view that Ronald Reagan single-handedly ended the cold war by standing tall against the Soviet Union). Instead, the foxes recognize that reality emerges from the interactions of many different agents and forces, including blind luck, often producing large and unpredictable outcomes.... They are less likely than hedgehogs to be invited to participate in television debates.

7. Non-Trivial Issues & Summary of the article

7.1 **Issues not trivial:** This is not to suggest that the issues mentioned by Dr. Subba Rao do not exist or are trivial. This exercise was only to put them in a larger perspective of public administration. Because as regards the IAS, one of the doyen's of our cadre, Mr. D. M. Sukthankar, its previous Chief Secretary put it very succinctly, (a) the need to enable specialisation while retaining its "generalist" character, (b) the need to nurture and encourage "independent" thinking and expression of views by civil servants, on the one hand, and willingness-cum-tolerance on the part of the political executive to bear with and accept the same, on the other, (c) lateral entry into the Service and its ramifications, (d) providing opportunities to Service officers to work in the private sector and its implications, (e) what will constitute an "appropriate" system of rewards and punishments, and how to objectively develop a metric thereof (f) how to encourage initiative and innovativeness, thinking outside the box and risk-taking, and so on, are complex issues and questions to which there are no easy or obvious solutions/answers. These will need a workable roadmap.

Some experimentation is inevitable and should not be frowned upon. However, there is no need to go on the back foot and only commiserate.

Summary:

7.2 There is no “Pedigree” in IAS. Perceptions of elitism are also not peculiar to IAS; it pervades across callings. Over time, measurable efforts have been made to make IAS more representative of the societal fabric of the country.

7.3 Assertion that IAS must move towards meritocracy is unexceptionable. Over time, its members have been striving towards self-improvement. Lateral entry (from private sector into government) is a worthwhile mechanism that the PM has already put in place and needs to be assessed. Do we make it a two-way stream for cross fertilization of ideas?

7.4 IAS does *not* reward mediocrity. On the contrary its promotion policies for higher echelons (empanelment) are policies of weeding out the relatively mediocre. One needs to compare with other allegedly meritocratic organisations how and with what percentage they weed out mediocrity at different levels to see if these can be adapted, *mutatis mutandis* also to IAS.

7.5 There is need to put in a framework for competence index for measurement of competency to at least qualitatively gauge how far away IAS is from perfect competency or meritocracy. KRA may be one such way. Devising a workable metric is not trivial. Experience of other organizations can be factored into.

7.6 IAS does not have any inherent DNA for risk aversion. It comes through a lack of framework for distinguishing honest (bonafide) mistakes for actions taken in good faith from those with guilty minds. So such a framework needs to be built up. *Mens rea* and Law on torts may empower honest competent officers to take on more risks in public interest in good faith. There is no use pretending that it is not all politicians' fault that IAS is risk averse.

7.7 Credibility (or the lack of it) of IAS cannot be judged by isolated facile examples.

7.8 Issues presented are complex, non-trivial and require continuous deliberations. Merely listing issues and lamenting thereon will not pave the way forward. Considered solutions need to be presented for discussion and decision.

7.9 Modern Public Administration and delivery systems require synthesizers capable of at once taking along subject matter specialist as well as providing leadership (or both the hedgehogs and the foxes are required.) IAS is emerging as *generalized specialists or T shaped officers* capable of such synthesis who have the ability to dive deep in one area (the vertical **bar of the T**), while also covering a broad range of topics at a lower level (the **horizontal bar** or the hilt across the top of the letter).