

**Inauguration of the National Conference of State Public Service
Commissions - 4th February, 2019 at Bhubaneswar**

“Allow me to briefly mention the role of the Public Service Commissions and the *Raison d’etre* of this National Conference.

2. Introduction of democratically elected governments, based on universal adult suffrage, was the starting point for establishing of autonomous Public Service Commissions in various countries. Prior to this, civil servants were appointed on the basis of nepotism and patronage. A democratic system pre-supposes a periodic change in the political leadership. A stable and secure civil service was therefore necessary for successfully working as an impartial and efficient instrument of governance through which Governments, of whatever ideological orientation, could give effect to their policies. An autonomous public service recruitment body, it was realized, also protects the Executive from group influences and popular pressures which they may have to distance from, once they form the Government.

2. The Public Service Commissions in India are in a much stronger position than statutory bodies and Commissions in countries like the UK and the USA, where such bodies have been created by the Legislature. In India, the Public Service Commissions are in no way subordinate to the Legislature or the Executive and along with the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Election Commission of India, they form an integral part of the Indian Constitution. The Public Service Commissions, however, are recommendatory bodies and their recommendations are not binding on the Government. Therefore, despite their Constitutional identity, the founding fathers of our Constitution have envisaged that there should be no conflict, or clash of interest, between the work of the Public Service Commissions and the Government.

3. The National Conference of Chairmen of State Public Service Commissions in India, which was established in 1949, is a unique body which was conceived as a forum where Chairpersons of all the State Commissions could share their experiences, discuss issues facing them and see if they could learn from each other to strengthen their systems - without in any way diluting the autonomous status of each body. The conference has met regularly since 1999. There is no laid down

hierarchy amongst the Commissions and therefore, there is no question of any one body advising the others. This Conference also does not bestow on itself any power to guide its constituent members and the question of prescribing procedures or issuing guidelines, therefore, does not arise. We share our best practices and learn from each other, voluntarily adopting whatever we deem suitable for our own situations.

4. Each State Public Service Commission operates in its unique circumstances devising its own methods and procedures to maintain the three basic characteristics of any merit based selection process. These involve building a system which is:

- (i) free from favoritism;
- (ii) free from external influence; and
- (iii) free from any bias on grounds of class, caste, gender, religion, economic background or political orientation.

5. All our systems have to ensure that the selection processes should be able to withstand judicial and public scrutiny on these counts. The corollary to the above is that we should welcome Right to Information queries and Court interventions and, in fact, look upon them as mechanisms for external oversight, which we should endeavor to leverage for strengthening our systems.

6. Just how critical is the role of Public Service Commissions for a fair selection process has been highlighted recently in two specific cases -

- (1) The Lateral Entry scheme for Joint Secretary level officers in the Union Government, and
- (2) The Supreme Court Judgment in the Prakash Singh case regarding empanelment of DGPs, Heads of Police Force, of all States and UTs in India.

In both these cases, the Union Government or the Supreme Court wanted to make the selection process fair, impartial and to be carried out with due diligence. They sought the help of the UPSC, which, of course was extended ungrudgingly in the spirit of identifying the right people for the right jobs. Suppose our systems were not as robust as they are, who would have done the selection? Would not the integrity of the institutions concerned come into question if the selection was not transparent and based purely on merit and merit alone? This is not to say that other

arms of the Government could not have been entrusted with the responsibility, but, as mentioned in the beginning, the Executive and the Legislative bodies would find it more difficult to deal with the pressures and external influences than constitutionally mandated PSCs who have greater autonomy in their working.

7. It is the above mentioned degree of autonomy which varies from State to State and each PSC has to devise its own systems to maintain their integrity. Over the next two days we will talk about making the available systems strong. We have our strengths and our weaknesses, we have hundreds of years of experience amongst ourselves and we are committed to learn from each other to play our role in the spirit of the Constitution.”

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**Valedictory address at the National Conference of State Public
Service Commissions; 5th February, 2019 at Bhubaneswar**

“I have no doubt that all of us have benefitted from these discussions and are carrying back new thoughts and ideas to address our concerns and improve our work practices - not only to bring greater transparency and efficiency in our work, but equally importantly to strive towards making the examination process candidate friendly.

2. All of us are cognizant of the stress which aspirants for various jobs have to go through and our endeavor is to see if we can reduce this stress for all our candidates, especially those at the graduate entry level, who are entering the job market for the first time.

3. Over the years, the UPSC has brought an increasing number of exam- related interactions and transactions on-line. Apart from making the examination process more candidate-friendly, the new systems also serve to cut down the time cycle for each examination. We are looking into better quality of venues for the examinations and see if we can introduce a system whereby non-serious and under-prepared candidates could be encouraged to withdraw their applications well in time to reduce the logistics required for conducting the examinations. Our view is that if we are able to work with genuine and serious candidates, we can give them better facilities and make our system more efficient. We have started offering withdrawal option on a voluntary basis for some of our examinations and hope to expand it to other exams in a gradual manner.

4. Bearing in mind the job aspirations of the youth, the Commission is now disclosing the scores and ranking of non-recommended candidates in some examinations on its website and further linking it with the “National Career Services” portal of the Ministry of Labor and Employment. Central Ministries and organizations can use this data base for their recruitment. This will, conceivably, obviate the need for multiple and separate examinations by different organizations for posts with similar entry level qualifications. It will also reduce the stress on young job aspirants and reduce the time taken for recruitment by various bodies. Many other IT enabled procedures are being incorporated, to address clearly identified problem areas. Let me add

here, most emphatically, that we do not believe in 'change and innovation' for the sake of 'change and innovation'. Each innovation has to arise from a felt need and technology as a solution is based on a specific requirement. Under no circumstances is the induction of technology driven by available IT tools being pushed by vendors.

5. We are also closely looking at our interview processes to see how we can better gauge the candidates on issues of integrity, emotional stability, leadership qualities, aptitude for public service etc. which are not assessed during the written exam - which is essentially a test of scholastic attainment. We have opened dialogue with Public Service Commissions and similar bodies in the UK, Canada, France, Singapore and Malaysia etc. to learn about new approaches being adopted in these countries to select the most suitable candidates for various civil services.

6. Since we have amidst us today some senior civil servants in the State of Odisha, and from the Centre, I think it is only proper for me to touch upon the questions of morale and image of the civil services. By virtue of their position as bodies which safeguard the interests of the Services, the PSCs have a moral, if not legal, role to play in establishing the fair image of the Services. There is no point in blaming the declining social mores for all our problems. The questions we need to address are:

- (i) How to get the best people into the Services;
- (ii) How to train and motivate them to give off their best, and
- (iii) How to insulate the Services from the sources of corruption.

7. Let me expand on these issues:

- (i) Senior bureaucrats must look upon the PSCs as their *Alma Mater*. These are the institutions from where the public services begin and they need to be supported and strengthened in the interest of a strong administrative system;
- (ii) Senior bureaucracy has to commit itself to providing quality training for developing the manpower provided by the Public Service Commissions, inculcating in them the spirit of public service – the Constitution and the Law of the Land being sacrosanct at all times. It should become second nature to all civil servants that they have been provided their jobs to look after the interest of the common man.

- (iii) All civil servants have to clearly understand the difference between service and servitude. They are in the Government to serve the people without being subservient to anyone. Their primary role is to push the agenda of the underprivileged common man. They alone can take care of primary education, health, housing, law and order, sanitation, water supply etc.
- (iv) Since private enterprise has to be encouraged in the interest of creating jobs, civil servants will be called upon to facilitate industrial and commercial interests. Whatever be the responsibility assigned to them, civil servants, at all times, have to remember that they are the custodians of the common man's interest, the public money and the natural resources which belong equally to each and every Indian national.
- (v) It should be engrained in every public servant's mind that the common man wants good governance. All of us need to work together to rekindle the hope amongst the masses that they will get a sound administrative system, which is the *sine qua non* for the country's progress and a better life for all its citizens.

I leave you with these thoughts.”