

**Change Bureaucracy Change India**  
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**By Dr G Shreekumar Menon**

**THE** mandate of the 2014 General Election that swept the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) to power at the Centre is a milestone in Indian democracy. Disillusioned with decades of maladministration, lack of visionary leaders, coalition politics, vote-bank politics, and massive corruption the electorate pitched for the Narendra Modi led BJP to lead India into the 21 st century. The election slogan of "Ache Din", "Make in India" and "Swaachh Bharat" appealed to the masses and Narendra Modi was given a dream victory. The democratic electorate of India gave him a carte blanche, conferring on him dictatorial powers to spearhead the development agenda. It was as if the people of India wanted Narendra Modi to become the Lee Kuan Yew of India. They believed in his capabilities, trusted his words, his powerful oratory convinced them about his leadership ability. Modi was the person who would and could uplift India into the ranks of the Top 5 nations of the world.

One year after the verdict, the electorate is still waiting to see the take-off. There is a general impression that Modi and his team are directionless and an air of uncertainty is discernible.

The impatient electorate delivered a clear warning in the New Delhi Legislative Assembly elections. It gave a sweeping victory to a former bureaucrat Mr.Arvind Kejriwal to take over and rejected the BJP. But again Arvind and his team are also floundering.

Two dream verdicts delivered by the people of India, in the belief that untrammelled power would lead the way to rapid progress and prosperity stands belied. People are unable to decipher why the government is not able to perform and is dithering. The strains of "acche din" is almost inaudible. There is no transformation only unexplainable stagnation, no path breaking Lee Kuan Yew type initiatives, no strategies, somewhere the script has deviated from the main story. What has gone wrong?

Democracy is supposed to rest on three pillars, Legislature, Judiciary and Executive or Bureaucracy. The Legislature conceives, formulates and directs the policies, the Bureaucracy is the sole delivery mechanism to execute all the policies and the Judiciary deliberates on the legality of the actions of both, the Legislature and the Bureaucracy. This simple division of labor has now become complicated and regressive. The Bureaucracy has undergone a metamorphic transformation to become a hydra headed monster, expanding and swallowing both, the Legislature and the Judiciary.

Transgressing into the domain of the Legislature, retired bureaucrats have managed to usurp gubernatorial posts, some have become Members of Parliament and Members of Legislature, and some have become ministers at the Centre and in the States.

Invading into the Judiciary, the Bureaucracy has grabbed an equal share in all quasi-judicial posts, in Tribunals, Commissions, Regulatory Authorities and Ombudsman posts.

Conversely, the Bureaucracy has guarded its own turf very zealously, denying entry even to specialists and experts. Even lateral entry for limited duration of time has been successfully resisted and prevented. It has become a cloistered monolith, acquiring sweeping powers, privileges, and immunities, all in the name of public service.

Every political appointment, every judicial appointment has to be scrutinized, examined and approved by the bureaucracy, it decides who will sit where and in what position by

citing intelligence clearance reports. This evolution of the bureaucracy into a single window agency for all postings and appointments, even in the Legislature and the Judiciary is a fascinating study in power expansion. The present day Indian bureaucracy, originated as the Indian Civil Service (ICS) by performing the role of a watchdog for the British Crown. Hence it was vested with suppressive, oppressive and repressive powers designed to extricate maximum revenue, supply slave labour and generally aid in plundering the native population. The remarkable ease with which a handful of ICS officers controlled, managed and abetted plundering is an amazing story of sycophancy, servility, corruption and brazen exercise of power and brutality. Russian Communist leaders were amazed as to how the British Crown controlled faraway India and its millions of people through a handful of officers. This so called "iron frame" which served the colonial masters, was passed on to the new rulers of independent India. The nomenclature changed from ICS to IAS, and the bureaucracy expanded itself into a rigid hierarchy, fissured and fractured into dozens of allied services, presided over by the IAS. Today, the bureaucracy is hopelessly fragmented, splintered and become into a regressive force. Mislabeling themselves as All India Services the IAS & IPS created a state based cadre system involving what is known as insider/outsider categories. To put it simplistically, insiders are local people and outsiders are those coming from other states. Needless to say the insiders enjoyed a distinct edge over the outsiders due to caste, language and community factors, and the local politicians found it advantageous to cultivate the insiders, which has created a highly politicized bureaucracy in every state. All India Service officers are identified as sympathizers of one political party or another. These sympathizers get rewarded with post retirement assignments ranging from a few months to a couple of years, governorships, coveted posts in Tribunals, Commissions and directorships in public sector banks and undertakings. Every five years after elections, there is a flight of opportunistic bureaucrats from state capitals to New Delhi and vice versa. These bureaucrats are the silent saboteurs, frustrating many a project to secretly placate their political godfathers and patrons. Rewards come in the form of plum postings in Constitutional bodies, election tickets, ambassadorial and UN assignments.

This is the reason why our bureaucrats do not want any reforms in their domain. The archaic system set up by the British to suppress and loot a colony is still being retained, preserved and perpetuated, using a specious argument that it is the "iron frame". Crafty bureaucrats have frozen the British model to enjoy colonial style orderlies, privileges and benefits, which are anathema in any other developed country. Today, even probationer civil servants are being sent abroad to learn the best practices in other countries, but none of these practices are ever permitted to happen in India. The only reforms are the periodical "cadre-reviews" so that time bound promotions take place, by creating more posts and more hierarchies which only inconvenience the general public. The bureaucracy has thus fattened and become bloated causing enormous public expenditure.

Why is there no "cadre review" in the Judiciary, where cases are accumulating for decades and no litigant can ever expect a verdict in a reasonable span of time? There is no increase in the number of courts commensurate with the increasing cases, nor in the number of judges. Exploiting this situation, the bureaucracy has quickly set up Tribunals and Settlement Commissions in every department and made them into post-retirement havens, granting themselves status of High Court judges and an extended retirement age ranging from 62 to even 70 years! Is it not time to change this archaic system of governance?

Mr. Narendra Modi was speaking of minimum governance but why has no concrete steps been taken? Take the case of Defense acquisitions, there is a total breakdown in the purchase of critical hardware, as vacillating IAS officers in different ministries continue to dither endlessly. Why can't Mr. Modi just disband this nonfunctional coterie and replace it with a fast track committee of experts. There is an urgent need to stop circulating files

between IAS officers in Defense, Finance and Law, when the country is sandwiched between two aggressive and non-friendly neighbors. Years of dithering and wavering by reluctant officers to take timely decisions is putting the country's defenses in grave jeopardy.

In this age of globalization, privatization and liberalization, why is the bureaucracy not being downsized and thereby public expenditure curtailed? Why are ministries and departments not being merged? The recent fracas that took place at Calicut airport between CISF personnel and the Kerala Fire Force personnel resulting in the death of one CISF officer is a glaring instance of total lack of coordination between various agencies, central, state and private working at our airports. When other countries like USA, UK and Europe have gone in for a single Border Protection Agency, we are having multiple agencies fighting among themselves in the name of service superiority, rank and protocol. Our bureaucrats regularly travel abroad and the unified Border Protection Force is the first best practice which anybody can observe, yet they don't want to implement this back home. Mr. Modi has to simply issue a directive to follow the U.S. and U.K. model of Border Protection by merging all the departments functioning on the borders. If the U.S. could successfully merge over two dozen departments immediately after 9/11, there is no reason why India can't do it.

A Harvard Professor observed that in India one section of the bureaucracy is engaged full time in suppressing and working against the rest, in other words it is IAS versus the other services. Mr. Modi needs to take the bull by the horns and in a single stroke merge all these services into a single integrated entity to wipe out forever all inter service rivalry, acrimony and feuds. The one rank one pension demand itself is being stalled in the name of financial implications. But witness the profligacy of the bureaucrats in transfers and postings. An annual minimum wasteful expenditure of more than a thousand crores are splurged on transferring bureaucrats of all ranks across the length and breadth of the country. The British used transfers as a weapon to control the ICS officers from having a good rapport with the local natives. For what reason are we preventing our bureaucrats from having a good relationship with the citizens of India? Even the British, and the United States have renounced the transfer system in their country, thereby saving enormous expenditure and useless unproductive paperwork. Even this simple best practice followed in other countries has not been adopted by our globetrotting bureaucrats. Mr. Modi needs to freeze all transfers and utilize those funds for much needed reforms. In fact one rank one pension can be implemented across the entire spectrum of the bureaucracy, and thereby cut down superfluous paperwork, thereby liberating a huge workforce which can be utilized to improve public services. This workforce is now wasted, in preparation of pension papers, auditing them, getting approvals and sanctions. Another huge workforce is wasted in preparing TA claims, LTC claims, medical claims, educational allowance and a whole host of work relating to the perks of the staff. All this can be replaced by a flat allowance and the workforce liberated for utilization in critical areas so that quick and timely delivery of public service improves.

Precious funds are wasted in performing overlapping functions. In every government office a sizeable workforce is devoted for internal audit, this is apart from a professional cadre of auditors in the CAG office, and statutory auditors of the assesses, meaning, three entities audit the same set of records! All internal audit can be wound up and the staff utilized for better and quicker public service. In certain departments in the name of cadre review Audit Commissionerates have been set up, the sheer wastage of precious resources and manpower can be imagined.

Similarly, the multiple Central Police Organizations being maintained at phenomenal cost to the exchequer can be minimized if all of them are merged and allowed to operate as a single entity. Presently, there are multiple training establishments, communication

networks, bases in different parts of the country, and massive infighting between regular recruits and deputationists in these organizations.

The mess the Judiciary find themselves in is due to bureaucrats handling quasi-judicial work. Instead of strengthening the Judiciary, the bureaucrats smelt an opportunity to expand and get promotions, and thereby started passing quasi-judicial orders which was not their core expertise. Frivolous orders are passed which are upheld at the first appellate stage, again handled by bureaucrats. Thereafter it goes to Tribunals and Settlement Commissions, again partly manned by bureaucrats. Their orders are never accepted by the bureaucracy which routinely files appeals inundating the High Courts. This system needs to be changed and all quasi-judicial work must be performed whether at the ground level or at the appellate levels by trained judicial officers only. The bureaucracy should perform only their task and not to transgress into the domain of the judiciary.

Induction of specialists and experts by way of lateral entry needs to be made into a norm to infuse a constant stream of professional lawyers, chartered accountants, and management specialists into the bureaucracy. This will entail abolishing all the so called cadre posts. It is the tax payers right to get the best man for the post. Reservations for IAS officers in the name of cadre posts are all encouraging mediocrity, and misfits occupying critical posts.

Foreigners perceive India to be a mass of in disciplined humanity occupying a large swathe of land mass. The constant struggle for survival has led to fierce competition, rampant indiscipline and consequent corruption, lack of morality and poor civic sense. India needs to go in for compulsory conscription, like neighboring China and Singapore, but taking into consideration the enormous logistics involved, it would be better to initially give a one year stint in the Army and other para military organizations for all ranks of new government recruits, to instil discipline and patriotism. Presently, there are approximately 57 lakh central government employees, by giving compulsory conscription, for a period of one year, to all fresh recruits, the government will have a massive force to bank upon to tackle naxalism and terrorist crimes, and foreign war threats.

Mr.Modi's Make in India policy can succeed only if there is a preliminary policy of "Prepare India" to remove all bureaucratic hurdles. The entire bureaucracy needs to be changed from A to Z by swift and deft strokes. The archaic system of bureaucracy set up in the era of Lord Corn wallis needs to be dumped and we need to adopt modern administrations followed in developed countries. Make in India will succeed only if we are able to assure investors that we have a transparent, efficient and specialized bureaucracy to attend to their requirements, not a fractious, dithering and a litigation prone bureaucracy. The need of the hour is to "Prepare India" to be able to handle "Make in India."

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