

It is satisfying to associate with the release of the book 'Reflection's on India's Public Policies' that lives upto its title.

Insightful and analytical discourse by ten esteemed IAS officers of the 1984 batch, seasoned policy makers and executors, bears out their contributions, rich exposure and experience as also concerns in the largest democratic governance, now home to 1/6th of humanity.

India's public policy evolution since independence has been marked with focus on survival, stability, self-sufficiency and securing equitable growth. In recent years, there has been a significant qualitative shift resulting in realisation of phenomenal growth.

Spectacular and dramatic emergence of the governance ecosystem in the last few years has turned out to be a game changer- with visionary initiatives and policies of the Prime Minister catalysing a wholesome environment making India a favoured global destination of investment and opportunity.

Series of affirmative governance steps in the last few years have enabled the steel frame significant 'play in the joints' enhancing its contribution capacity.

Incorporation of Section 17A in the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 in 2018 is a step in the right direction. It now regulates investigation of issues as regards the recommendations made or decisions taken by the public servant in the discharge of official functions and duties by providing prior approval of the concerned authority for investigation.

Extra-legal leveraging in power corridors that plagued the system for decades is now a matter of the past as power corridors now stand sanitised of this menace. This has enhanced bureaucratic efficiency and productivity.

Governance model, with focus on 'less Government, More Governance', transparency, accountability, digitisation, innovation, and entrepreneurship, is the envy of the world.

Zero tolerance for corruption, a new norm, is a ground reality, with none being above or beyond the reach of law.

With steadfast and visionary leadership and stable governance at the helm, there is emergence of a wholesome ecosystem in recent years enabling unleashing of bureaucratic prowess in expeditious execution of policies.

In the stressed global economic scenario, India is the fastest growing large economy with inflation in control. Now the fifth largest global economy, India is all set to be the third largest by the turn of the decade and there is no doubt about it. This upward surge thanks to bureaucratic commitment and steadfast leadership would for sure help India realize its due place in 2047 when the nation will be celebrating its centenary of independence.

Empowerment and upliftment of vulnerable sections has been effected with successful schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Ayushman Bharat, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, and Ujjwala Yojana, ensuring that even the most marginalized citizens have access to essential services. This remarkable accomplishment is due to the commitment and delivery effected by the civil servants.

Civil servants, backbone of governance, have played a fundamental role in the implementation of Government policies. I have always believed that the delivery mechanism of our Civil Servants is unparalleled in the world, unless they are forced to drag their feet on account of political hesitations. I can assure that for the last few years the political tentative hesitation approach is no longer in existence which has resulted in incremental contribution of the

bureaucracy to the growth trajectory of the nation. Visionary initiatives of the Prime Minister are being translated into action for which credit goes to bureaucracy and its senior leaders like you.

Digital payment transactions, amounted to \$1.5 trillion in 2022, are more than four times the combined transactions in US, UK, Germany and France. What could not be dreamt a few years ago is a ground reality recognised and acknowledged by all.

Laudable role has been played by civil service at all levels in the country in the fight against COVID-19, setting a new global benchmark. Which country on the planet can claim to have made available digitally over phone certificates of 220 crore people who got vaccination? No country can claim that distinction which our country has done. This has been possible by the successful involvement of the bureaucracy in realizing this.

The ethos of civil services in India is founded upon the principles of impartiality, excellence, and professionalism. I reflected on Civil Services day as well that your qualification, calibre, and competence entitles you to make money some of your peers are making. But the satisfaction which you get by serving humanity at large, changing the lives of 1.4 Billion people is not available to them. Therefore it is expected that after one demits office one must give back to the society – you do it everyday while being in service and thereafter.

Civil Servants must commit to serve the Nation with PRIDE and that is what they are doing, others need to emulate their mechanism - By Pride I mean:

- Public service without personal biases, I pause here to indicate that our bureaucratic system has checks and balances that ensures such kind of functioning. Observance and adherence to these scrupulous mechanisms is nearly one hundred percent.
- Rule of law implemented at grassroots levels,
- Integrity in dealings with the public,
- Devotion to duty, and
- Efficiency in achieving policy targets.

Democratic governance would pose its own unique challenges to the civil servants. They have to exhibit unwavering and steadfast commitment to rule of law and constitution. There can be no alibi for worrisome political ingratiating of the officials with the ruling dispensation in some parts of the country-severely straining the sublimity of Federalism. This calls for systemic focus by all concerned. I am particular about it. Ingratiating of bureaucracy with political masters in a state is generated by a compulsive ecosystem which cannot be combated by an individual officer. It can be antidoted and neutralised only by systemic working. I am sure, this shall be focused upon, as political ingratiating of bureaucracy is not only antithetical to the democratic governance but eats into the system and impedes growth, shakes confidence of the people and also compromises Federalism.

India's vision for 2047 is rightly ambitious, far-reaching and achievable- reflecting the country's aspirations to be a leading global power in the 21st century with a focus on sustainable growth, social inclusion, and technological advancements.

Civil servants are architects of good visionary policies and if a proof of that is required, one can go through this book.

Soothing to note that experienced senior civil servants have coalesced to share their wisdom and experience in this book "Reflections on India's Public Policies"- indeed a testament to the power of collective effort and cooperation.

The book, by those with decades of immersive involvement with governance, has been structured in a truly holistic manner, encompassing all the critical domains of development for the nation- ranging from public finance to health and education, from energy security to agriculture and rural industrialization. This compendium is indeed a highly effective repository of the vast experience that you have gathered in nearly four decades of public service.

While navigating the rough waters of administration, which are sometimes generated by forces which are there to help you, play an affirmative role, the distinguished contributors have revealed challenges personally encountered between policy making and policy implementation. You have tried to bridge the government's vision and people's perception, to achieve the spirit of citizen-centric governance. Citizen-centric governance is not an option; it is a must for the nation's development.

Retired Civil servants, unique valuable national human resource, must exemplify concern for the nation rather than fall prey to partisan stance by ever placing the interest of the Nation First.

Retired Civil Servants, a formidable class, is eminently positioned to neutralise and antidote false and anti-national narratives, from within and without, seeking to unjustifiably tainting and tarnishing our constitutional institutions and democratic values. Role of retired Civil servants in nation building is very significant. They are a reservoir of talent, experience and know what is best for the nation. They always speak their minds by analysing the false narratives from a position of strength.

The book undoubtedly will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, academicians, and students interested in public policy. As Chairman Rajya Sabha, I will ensure its wider dissemination and that the book is available to chairmans of various standing committees so that they can go to the book with the domain they are dealing with which will turn out to be rewarding and enlightening for the chairman of various standing committees and its members. Book offers a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing our nation, and provides a roadmap for creating a more equitable and prosperous future for all Indians.

This treatise will for sure put the reader in reflective mode and deserves to be on everyone's bed side. The book is a peep into the working of the largest democracy on the planet, home to the sixth of humanity. The authors have gone beyond scratching the surface. Indeed a deep dive by them. A must read for those who visualise exquisite India being a global leader in the near future.

Once again, I express my gratitude to all of you and the publisher for having brought the book in such a good shape. Thank You. Jai Hind!