



Addressing Conflict of Interest in Bureaucrats

What is the issue?

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- The mechanism for addressing conflict of interest needs a revamp to bring down corruption and increase governance efficiency.

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What is the current policy?

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- India has an official policy regulated by the Ministry of Personnel.

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- Accordingly senior bureaucrats have to seek permission for commercial employment after their retirement.

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- This is to avoid conflict of interest and is naturally inked with the aim of preventing corruption.

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- This is being followed from the British era as a measure of ensuring bureaucratic efficiency, especially in the collection of taxes.

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What are the concerns?

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- Some bureaucrats mix up the virtues of public service with that of private

profit in retirement.

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- And naturally end up in exposing themselves to a potential conflict of interest.

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- Grants of permission within cooling-off period depend primarily on government discretion, with no codified mechanism.

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- If a senior bureaucrat served for decades in the government and wanted to move out towards a corporate role, he/she faces much disapproval without any reason.

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What needs to be done?

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- A recommendation of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the DoPT called for early retirement if interested in post-retirement private service.

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- A private member's bill, The Prevention and Management of Conflict of Interest Bill was introduced in 2012.

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- These recommendations and legislations need to be implemented in true spirit.

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- The legislation ought to cover all arms of governance, including the judiciary, the legislature and the executive.

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- Mandatory cooling period needs to be increased to five years, so that no undue influence can be exerted by the retired bureaucrat.

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- An open, public data platform enlisting all post-retirement appointments of civil servants would increase transparency.

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- India needs a legislation to make non-disclosure of a conflict of interest punishable.

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- The reasons for declining bureaucrat's requests for joining such firms need to be laid out clearly, to limit political concerns.

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Source: The Hindu

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