



English rendering of the text of PM's address at the Awards for Excellence in Public Administration, on Civil Service Day 2017

Posted On: 21 APR 2017 8:16PM by PIB Delhi

Namaskar,

Today All India Civil Services Day can, in a way, be commemorated as the day of “re-dedication”. On this occasion, I take pride in congratulating all the great talents who have received this opportunity to work in this noble profession of Civil Services.

This illustrious gathering here represents diverse experiences from all parts of the country. It goes without saying that all of you are mindful of the powers, challenges and responsibilities that the badge of a Civil Servant entails. And it has been observed that the nation has always benefitted from this existing system of the Civil Services. However, times have changed. One cannot compare today's life with how things were a decade-and-a-half ago for the common man. Five years from now on, we are bound to see a different world altogether. Over the past two decades, the government was the only “go-to” machinery for every need of a citizen. Be it amenities like schools and hospitals or be it raw materials like cement, iron or steel, the government became the sole provider for all his needs. The government became everything. In situations where there is a monopolized tendency, there is a possibility of stagnation and corruption creeping into the system. It is a well-known fact that corruption breeds when there is no challenge to status quo. Government became almost invincible until globalisation provided alternatives for the people. Citizens were now exposed to private vs government choices. For example, they could now compare between the quality of private airlines and government ones. They were empowered about the crisp functioning of the private sector, and hence could conveniently opt out of government's poor quality of service. An alternative in the form of private sector emerged.

Earlier they used to be complacent with the services of a government doctor; just his smile and a casual recording of BP would make them feel positive about their health. However, now, despite several visits, people still regret having consulted a government doctor, and eventually go for a second opinion from a private doctor. The last 15-20 years have provided them with an “alternate”. The availability of an ‘alternative’ has increased accountability and responsibility of all government officials, particularly of the Civil Servants manifold compared to the previous decade. Not that the workload has increased, but the challenges have certainly become more critical. We feel inadequate in confronting these challenges.

To bring about qualitative change, competitiveness within the system plays a big role. Everything looks hunky dory in a system which is stagnated and devoid of aspirations and comparative analysis. But quantum progression happens only in a competitive environment which provides the much needed impetus to perform better. This, however, doesn't encapsulate that we pull someone down to create space for oneself. Rather, we should build ourselves together. The need of the hour is to immediately reinvent our working styles as well as mind-sets. It's high time that we moved from being ‘regulators’ to ‘enabling entities’. As soon as we do it, the same challenges shall convert into opportunities for us. We must ensure that we create an ecosystem of governance such that this same government turns out to be a convenience rather than a burden for any one. This can be a reality in the near future if only we change our perspectives to deliver good governance.

Efforts have already begun in the right direction. The testimonial is this revamped Civil Services Day itself. How has it been achieved? Well not because of the whim and fancy of the Prime Minister after all. No. Innovative and creative thinking made this event a celebration from what had become a mundane ritual. If we add vitality, connect wholeheartedly and have a futuristic vision then it is bound to add vigour to all our opportunities. If we appreciate the change, then such positive feelings are bound to be inherent in your every work.

It is important to immerse oneself in the system to experience and implement change. It brings great learning as you all are products of the same system. You will be developing yourselves from the ground level, accomplishing tasks first at the village level and then at the district level. There may be many who might have worked only at the district level. It was nice to see a quantum jump in entries above hundred. I do appreciate. I am sure everyone realised the importance of the work and sent the entries lest they be questioned. But when I saw the reports, this quantum jump immediately made me think that we should go for a qualitative analysis. It was encouraging to see the numbers rose from 100 to 500. It made sense to see the quality of the reports which were outstanding as well as those that did not achieve merit. It is not relevant to disclose those findings live on TV. However, I felt reassured that a change has been initiated. The Quantum jump reveals a bright future. Now I aspire for a qualitative change within a year. There must not be any entry which is below the category of ‘excellent’ because those who are now a part of this machinery have reached here because they were no less than excellent.

May be they would have attended coaching classes...yet they could make it till here only because they were indeed excellent. Excellence comes with its own price. You cannot afford to under-perform. So we have to make this habit of giving our best. You must have noticed the housewives. Their skill and talent never gets noticed in the family. She is always taken for granted. But unfortunately when the family loses its head, all of a sudden she has to dabble between all the responsibilities of the home as well as the family business. She adeptly rears her children and runs her family successfully and takes it to greater heights. She dons the crown of the family head in such a skilful way that males of the neighbourhood are put to shame. Some time back she was lost in an abyss, but what inherent strength she had! She bloomed bright and dared all the challenges while rendering her responsibilities. Similarly, some of you here may have experienced huge pressure while appearing for the civil services exams. But now you have been handed over the steering of public administration. This life-time opportunity shall unfold multiple avenues in front of all of you when you could add new and fresh perspectives. Hope you will embrace this opportunity wholeheartedly. I do realise that Hierarchy does become a burden sometimes. May be it percolates as a legacy from the British Rule which unfortunately still has its roots in Mussourie. We still do encounter pansophism in bureaucracy. The burden of experience reeks in often heard phrases like “I know it all”, “it was like this in our times”, “you are but a fledgling and we have been here too long”, “have managed districts 20 years ago”. This seems to get transferred across batches. It is time for the seniors to eliminate the view if this experience is becoming a burden to bureaucracy; lest this experience become an impediment to innovation and experimentation.

Is our system breeding insecurities at higher designations? Even when I am at the Secretary level, does it worry me that a young cadet will accomplish the task I had initiated 20 years back in a district. Am I shying away from raised fingers? What if someone scorns that a young chap did what I could not? What if someone questions my credibility? Then your pansophism is itself creating roadblocks in your career. Let's face the truth! Well, I can work for another district but not the one where I left work unaccomplished. You cannot digest someone else's success in that same district? Like it or not, but this happens to be the bitter truth. We should be proud of the fact that the terrain which we ploughed has been well irrigated by the facilities implemented by one young peer, so that the other could plant trees there. His successor made a grove out of it, which very soon gave fruits due to the efforts of another young recruit. Efforts of all the five are equally valuable only then the desired results could be achieved. If only we could work with such synergy, we would certainly be able to progress. This synergy is bound to strengthen our tradition. It is our collective responsibility to further this vision of progressive work culture. You may recall what I had cited as the biggest strength of civil services. It is no mean feat to achieve. As per a Gujarati proverb - and I am not sure how it translates in Hindi - “ઢોઢનિશાર યાનિ હોશિઆર નિ કદ્ર” a person who is weak actually realises the worth of an intelligent person. You are considered at par with politicians and that is the power of being a bureaucrat which you cannot afford to lose. The other is anonymity.

There have been several officers who have implemented innovative ideas in governance by carefully developing a vision and framework which eventually benefitted the nation. However, it becomes so difficult to trace that officer who got that idea and what did he do to achieve the commendable feat. I believe, this quintessential anonymity is the biggest strength of Civil Services. I understand its power. Honestly, don't you feel too that these values are depreciating?

I totally endorse the power of social media. I realise its importance; however, only if it brings inclusive development by engaging citizens. If I use social media to create awareness and empower people, let's say about a forthcoming vaccination programme in the district, then it is justified. But if this platform is being used to blow their own trumpets by posting their photos of the event then of course anonymity is at stake. These days I have noticed that officers at the district level are so called 'busy' as much of their time goes into misusing the technology. Hence, nowadays I have restricted the use of devices during my meetings. Otherwise they would remain distracted due to the phones. If only we have the wisdom to use these facilities intelligently and optimally, this technology can help us to reach out to every citizen of our country.

There has been a paradigm shift from E-governance to M-governance across the globe. Mobile governance is the call of the hour. And it is indispensable. But it should be utilised to meet the needs of the citizens. I believe anonymity is our virtue. It is overwhelming to think now as to how many minds would have designed the exquisite Taj Mahal; imagine the brain behind the concept paper; how many hands worked relentlessly on this masterpiece; would any of us be able to tell? But this inconceivable Taj Mahal stands a tall testimony to the efforts of the people from this region by and large.

That's the beauty of anonymity. You may have done a lot of work throughout your tenure at various levels, but when you sit to recount your five great achievements at the time of retirement it will be impossible to recall after a few decades. That's how selfless and committed you were to your services. This is the invaluable strength our country has and you are the owner of this virtue. I do understand its value. How anxious we become when even our photo frames are shifted! It's no mean thing to sacrifice the identity in national interest. I certainly appreciate the power of this virtuosity. It then becomes imperative for the newly inducted officers to uphold the tradition of selfless service that the seniors have so painstakingly established. Whether this new breed of civil servants would uphold or tarnish the reputation one would have to keep a really close watch.

As we are celebrating Civil Services Day, numerous committees and commissions for reforms in governance in the centre and the state governments are perhaps being set up. Those who have prepared the reports might not have read them. Six different people might have written it in bits and pieces and yet another person might have combined it. This is the truth. You like it or not, this is the reality. And even after this, nobody will be able to trace the address where the document might be lying. Even the states want to bring reforms and form commissions. Of course, some people get jobs after retirement, but no real transformation takes place. Even today I can say with my experience, it is my good fortune that if like you I was into this system, it would not be possible because I wouldn't have got a 'coaching class'. However, if a person works for 16 years, what does he become? He can become a Deputy Secretary, he can become a Director. So I would have been under the category of a Director because I have been working with you for the past 16 years. I am working with you under this very system. Therefore in my opinion, those working under this system have such a great experience that no commission can ever give any recommendations for reforms like these people - this thinking is completely erroneous. With whatever experience you have, any better recommendation can never come from anyone else outside this system. So I don't give importance to that school of thought, nor do I follow that. Can we inculcate this in our character? A person who is running this system with his experience, who is writing a paper, is very much a part of this exercise. I asked four people from the latest batch to write it down so that a new thought process develops. Everyone wrote. Maybe some of them have resorted to cut and paste method. Although I am not sure, because I have not seen it; but this is human nature. Nevertheless, something new might have come up.

Now, this exercise was not for achieving a degree or for getting an academic ranking or for getting recognition for the research paper. Whatever has come has come from experience. These have been said by a person who is down to earth, who daily spends his life with the farmers, with those who are doing clerical job, with those computer operators; he who deals with seasonal crises. Can we consider this as a holy-book? Even though this has been said by an ordinary human being, yet this comes from within which is a source of immense power. Can we make this our mind-set? You see, When some thought comes from within we are its owners. Ownership is the guarantee for any success. Success comes only when a team acknowledges its ownership. As the number of 'ownerships' increases, success comes faster, accountability reduces, burden reduces, and everyone gets the credit. This effort is one type of 'ownership movement'. These two days of our discussions is very crucial as it is a part of our 'ownership movement'. Everyone feels that this is my country, my government, my accountability; I should bring out results and get solutions to the problems.

Definitely you must be knowing how and when you will be tested as an individual because you are sitting in that position. A situation where you do not have anything can never evaluate you correctly. A situation where you have everything, can evaluate you properly. You have everything yet you are aloof; then only you will be able to realize - yes, this is something. If we don't get anything then we feel that let it continue like this; so no one sees or gives any importance to it. You have every kind of power; the entire governance system is at your fingertips, the power of your word, your sign can change a hell of a lot of things. Then in that scenario what do you do, is your real test. And therefore, an individual can never be judged in a situation where he does not have any power, the proper evaluation of a person is done only when he has all the power.

By and large, we have passed through such periods in the country, where many of us know how to find ways when things are lacking. But how to manage when things are in abundance, by and large, has never been the thinking of the larger class. They know how to perfectly manage a famine but do not know how to manage excess yield. There they miss it out again. They know how to fill the vacant seats in the engineering college, but when the seats fall short and the number of students increases, then how to manage it? Then they are in a dilemma.

The way the country is growing; common man's expectations are also growing. Sometimes abundance becomes conspicuous. On the one hand, water is being wasted in fountains and at the same time if a notice is issued that one has to bath with less water; then it becomes very difficult to follow that order. Wherever we have abundance or the possibilities of abundance, can we change our mind-set accordingly? Otherwise we will not be able to grow. Our thought process will stagnate. We have to accept those challenges and move forward.

As I said in the beginning, we were working in isolation, and there was no competition even with the other district. This district has plenty of water and thus the cultivation is good; that district is dry; therefore cultivation is not possible; It happens, me and my ancestors did it too, it was like that. Now, not only the districts, the world has changed so much so that now there is competition among the states and also between countries. There is competition between yesterday and today. We need to raise ourselves to the challenges every moment and also in the global context.

Another strength of the civil servant, I believe, is his dutifulness. It is like a religion to a civil servant. He has no right to move away from that religion. If I am sitting in the district, sitting in the tehsil or sitting in the form of final authority; it is his obligation to weigh every proposal, incident, and decision with the scales of national interest and he does not have the right to see it in isolation. I am taking this decision here but will it have any negative impact in any corner of my country? My work will be done here, I will be applauded for my work, but will my decision negatively affect anyone in my country? These scales are with the civil servants. His training has been designed in such a way that there is no shortcoming in him. Governments will come and go; the leaders will come and go; this system is immortal. And the fundamental religion of this system is to weigh every decision with national perspective. And he will also have to see its impact on the future too. It is imperative that he thinks about the impacts on the future. And so, with the training received in the Civil services how do we make ourselves relevant to the changing times is the question that needs to be pondered over. If we become irrelevant in the changing times, then where will the situation reach, and it will be shameful for us. And therefore we have to continuously overhaul our institutional growth, institutional development, and institutional mechanism and lubrication is needed.

Yes there was a lot of discussion on HR. I do not know whether the subject on lubricating the HR was touched upon. We are all civil servants but what is the reason that a 25 year old case has still not been resolved; the 30 year old case has not been resolved? This is not due to the lack of leadership decision but the department is at fault. The file is stuck between the two departments, what is the reason? And that is why the issue has been taken up by the Prime Minister of India under PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation) Scheme. Such matters get listed in the PRAGATI scheme and are monitored under the programme. These are decided quickly within 24 hours. All clearances are given fast and finally the projects get cleared. The projects worth 8-9 lakh crores were cleared; what was the reason? If PRAGATI is successful, then I can cheer that there is a prime minister of

the country who is solving several problems with the use of technology. But for me, it is not a subject of contentment. For me it is a matter of learning and the subject of learning is that all my friends should think, why is it that the decision that you took 24 hours was stuck up for 15 years? Road is being constructed, people need it; but the project clearance was stuck up in the forest department, till the Prime Minister intervened and got the clearance for it; this situation is not good. Cheer for Modi for the success of PRAGATI, will not be good for the country; it is a temporary thing. It will be really beneficial for the country if my system runs smoothly. There should be a lubricating system in each officer; there should be lubricating cooperation. Friction dissipates power, lubrication makes the power smooth. Do we think in that direction? I still do not understand. Why do the two government departments quarrel, I do not understand. Why two different departments go to court with different views, when the government is one? Do we accept our weakness as a single All India Civil Service? Is anyone afraid of his obligation? Is he running away from his responsibilities? Or is it the ego that is playing a spoilsport. This should be our opportunity to introspect on Civil Services Day. So much time of our courts is being wasted and several obstacles are coming in the way of the common man of the country. And what is the reason for the defeat and win in a case, if an officer writes a line in the file without understanding, and any vested interested group gets hold of the file, then problems may crop up. While discussing an issue one need not think of whether a decision has been taken quickly with an ill intention. No such allegations have been proved right so far. And therefore, no need to keep this hesitation in mind because if you have done this with integrity, sincerity and in the interest of the public, then no power in the world can harm you. If anything happens for a moment, let it happen, we will see, I am standing with you as a support.

Work should be done with integrity, who will stop you? And today an opportunity has come to take decisions with courage; today an opportunity has come to think out of the box. Today an opportunity has come to change the status quo by taking a new path from the existing path and I believe everybody working with me would have had such a rare opportunity in his life which has come today because I am a person with this mindset.

Here we are talking of reform, perform, transform. Reform depends on the will of the political class but everything depends on your duty for 'Perform'. The will-power of political class can bring the 'reform' but if this duty of the team slackens, then Performance will suffer, and if there is no public participation then there is no transformation. So these three things; Political will-power, it can reform, but the Bureaucratic system, governance, it performs. And public-participation transforms. It is very important that we run these three in a wave length. When we run these three in a wave length, we get the desired results.

I would like to see that for the civil services day we should not let any paucity in introspection. Think of the day when you were selected for civil services; how your parents looked at you, what was the reaction of your friends. And also think of the moment when you moved away from your home to achieve this goal. I believe, the first feeling of your success can be the greatest and the excellent guide for you in your profession. That could be the strength of your life. If it is different from that, I think you have been derailed. On the other hand if it is maintained, then you are on the right track. You need not remember my words, nor do you need to remember the suggestions given by so many of your seniors throughout India. I would like to repeat that the feeling on the first day of your selection will remain the only motivation for you. I cannot accept that this country is going to suffer any loss. Dear friends you do not need anything from outside. Recall that spirit, time and again, on the occasion of this civil services day; search for those moments, when your parents came to know that you had passed UPSC and became an IAS. Recall the events when your parents were witnessing that you were proceeding towards Mussoorie after passing UPSC and becoming IAS. Think of the day when your parents accompanied you to the Railway Station to see you off and your friends might have come to the Bus Stand to drop you. Remember the dreams you have seen within first 24, 48 hours of your success; what was passing through your mind. Is there any dilution and diversion from them? You just need this evaluation because it will be a great strength within you and no other motivational story is needed.

Govt. has a typical nature. It needs a big change, and that target of change has been achieved. Is it true that these statistics can really change the destiny of the people? There is a very common story prevailing among you people, perhaps you know. Two persons were working in a garden. A senior person was watching them. Both were working hard and were sweating heavily. One of them was digging and the other was filling mud into it. The man became curious. So he went to them and asked, what both of you are doing brothers? One of them replied, we are not two, in fact we are three. He asked them, then where is the third one? The third has not come today, they replied. What job you all are performing? One of them explained, my job is to dig a trough, the person who has not come today, his job is to plant a tree and the other person's job is to put mud in the trough. But we are doing our job. The work is not being done by the person who is absent. We will carry on the work as far as our duty is concerned. They worked as many hours as they thought, the mud was removed and put back accordingly. But the question remained, did this process benefit our country? Nothing, because one person was missing.

It means we need to measure everything as Outcome Centric. First time, we dare to initiate in last year's budget, an outcome related document. A few people may have studied it. For first time the outcome related document was associated with the budget. We should incorporate this principle in our work culture and to percolate the message down the hierarchy, everything should be measured as an outcome and not as an output. Output is alright for the CAG. Outcome is one step ahead of CAG (CAG+1), and the democracy of the country is two step ahead of the CAG. If we look for CAG centric Output, then perhaps we will not be able to see a change in the country. We will be able to certainly contribute something to the country, if we work with the idea of CAG+ Outcome.

For the first time after 70 years of Independence, that completing 100 per cent processes, the budget of the country was passed before 31st of March and the New Budget was effected from 1st April. Who made it possible? You all made it possible. It means that even today I believe, you have the courage to implement the determined actions as a team. So my confidence has multiplied manifold. Whenever somebody talks of pessimism, I remember you people, I remember your duties, and pessimism leaves me, disappointment can never touch me.

I have vast experiences in managing Gujarat, but here I have spent only three years. My three years' experience say that every idea floated by me, could come with an outcome. I don't remember any incidence of non-implementation of ideas given by me. So, who did it? It is political will which matters for reforms. I am not facing that problem, rather I have an extra political will. However, action is necessary to perform. Can you tell me who takes that action? If a Prime Minister puts any idea before his team, who converts the idea into policy? That is done by you people. Who allots the responsibility? You do it. Who plans for resource allocation? You do it. After deciding all these aspects, who does the Monitoring? You do it. Who traces the loopholes? That again is done by you. Any outsider will be surprised if they find out that the same people trace their weaknesses, find out their faults and make the efforts to rectify those. This homogeneous system, the All India Civil Service, is a blessing to our nation. Therefore, this day is important for the country as this system was established which evaluates itself, introspects itself and moves ahead to build the nation. Probably we remain two steps behind the expectations yet we keep our efforts going to fulfil the dreams of the people. All this is done by the team. How the respect of the people can be enhanced towards this team? Why a negative feeling prevails in the minds of the people at large? You should also introspect. You are not ill-intentioned people; you have not committed anything wrong, you have not come out to do any harm, even then why is it that people have doubts in their minds about you. You must introspect. If you do this, I don't think that some big change would be required. There are minor things, which need to be corrected. If we manage it, then this lack of faith could be converted into respect.

When Kashmir was struck by floods, the army men sacrificed their lives to protect the people. Then the same people, who might be pelting stones some other day, appreciate the role of the Army that day. May be for a moment they appreciate it, but at least the people feel that these are the people who die to save us. This strength you have. With this bright past, we are the people, who are forward looking.

I expect from you, till 2022, when we will be celebrating the 75th year of our Independence, can we make sure that country should not be run in parts but as a whole like a dream. We should work as a catalytic agent to convert every dream into a resolution. Why this idea should not come in the minds of one hundred twenty-five crore Indians.

By 2022 it is our duty to make a resolution to fulfil the dreams of our great freedom fighters and reach this stage. We should also introspect. As a public servant I think, the unit which I look after, shall have its resolutions or not? Would I be able to perform for the fulfilment of my dreams as well as the dreams of the people, with whom I work? Would it be possible to tag them with me? I would like to repeat, it will be injustice to the freedom fighters, who sacrificed their lives for the country, if in the year 2022, on the occasion of 75th year of our Independence, every personnel working in GOI, in any post, big or small, it does not become a dream for them. This must be our resolution.

We talk about the cleanliness of the river Ganga. Will there not be a civil servant, who has a village on the bank of the river Ganga, in his or her charge? There must be a village which is under the charge of a civil servant. Ganga cleanliness mission has been in operation since the era of Rajiv Gandhi, the villages situated on the bank of this river must have come under the charge of a civil servant, at the time of his posting in the district or Tehsil. A public servant should make a resolution - if I am in civil service, the country wants the Ganga to be clean, GOI has a programme to clean the Ganga, and I will not let the litter to go into the river from the village situated on its bank. Can't my friends take this type of resolution? If my officer in-charge there once decides that from the village under his charge will not permit the garbage to be thrown into the river then nobody should doubt about the cleanliness of Ganga. The mode of operation needs to be decided here only.

We need to associate ourselves with the concept of the management of our dreams and resolutions at micro level. The feeling of ownership ought to be there. If we do things like that, then change can be brought. Imagine that the world is pinning its hopes on India. India is seen by the world with its changing democratic values. In the past we may have taken several steps for our subsistence. However, before 2022 we must dream that India should emerge as a world power. We should work according to this dream. This is not only the duty of the elected representatives, but the public servant should also owe this responsibility, rather the people working under the system of governance share the greater burden of this responsibility. Then whether you are an administrator or a ruler, if we go in the same direction, may be with a different wave length, I believe we will definitely achieve the outcome.

We always remember Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel. The efforts to develop this system in Indian context has been done by so many people. Now we have the responsibility in this changing world full of challenges and in the competitive atmosphere to prove ourselves and how we will be able to fulfil the dreams of the common man.

I once again congratulate, on this Civil Services Day, to each and every friend living in every corner of the world. I appreciate the contribution of all the generations of the service, who have worked ceaselessly to elevate the country to this level. Thanks a lot and best wishes.

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