

**Inauguration of the National Conference of State Public Service Commissions; 13th
March, 2020 at Chandigarh**

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good Morning and a very warm welcome to this 22nd National Conference of Chairpersons of State Public Service Commissions, in this beautiful city of Chandigarh.

Let me start by briefly touching upon the evolution of the Public Service Commissions in India.

The Government of India Act, 1919 had provision for establishment of a Public Service Commission for “recruitment to and control of” the Public Services in India. In 1923, a Commission headed by LORD ARTHUR HAMILTON LEE, was appointed to go into the question of ethnic composition of the Superior Civil Services in India. The Commission submitted its report, popularly known as the LEE COMMISSION REPORT, in 1924, wherein it urged for provision of a Commission which would be an integral part for functioning of future Civil Services in India. The Central Public Service Commission was accordingly set up on **October 1, 1926**, with SIR ROSE BARKER, a senior Member of the Home Civil Service, as its Chairman. The Government of India Act, 1935 further envisaged a Public Service Commission for the Federation and Provincial Public Service Commissions for the Provinces, or groups of Provinces. With the 1935 Act coming into effect on **1st April, 1937** the Public Service Commission became the Federal Public Service Commission and the Provincial Public Service Commissions came into being. Later with inauguration of the Constitution of India on **January 26, 1950**, the Federal Public Service Commission came to be known as the Union Public Service Commission and the Provincial Public Service Commissions became the State Public Service Commissions.

The Public Service Commissions in India, thus constituted, 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. Being an integral part of the Constitution, the Public Service Commissions in India are not subordinate to the Legislature or the Executive. While they are recommendatory bodies whose advice is not binding on the Government, the PSCs have the mandate for making competition-based selections to provide a stable and secure civil service, necessary for impartial and efficient governance, irrespective of the political parties in power.

The National Conference of Chairmen of Public Service Commissions in India, established in 1949, is a unique forum where Chairpersons of all the State Commissions share their experiences, discuss issues facing them and see if they can learn from each other to strengthen their systems - without in any way diluting their individual autonomous status. The conference has met regularly since 1999. This Conference 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 to maintain the three basic characteristics of any merit based selection i.e. free from favoritism, external influence and bias on grounds of class, caste, gender, religion, economic background or political orientation.

In a multi-lingual and multi-religious country like India, which has a number of minority groups and backward classes, an autonomous public service recruitment body protects the Executive from group influences and popular pressures. In two recent instances i.e. (i) the Lateral Entry scheme for Joint Secretary level officers and (ii) empanelment of DGPs, Heads of Police Force for States and UTs, the Union Government and the Supreme Court, respectively, reposed faith in the UPSC to carry out fair and transparent selections based purely on merit. Both decisions acknowledged the fact that constitutionally mandated PSCs having greater autonomy in their working were better placed to make merit based selections. These characteristics apply not only to examinations and recruitment, but also equally to DPCs, SCMs, deputation cases and tendering advice in disciplinary matters.

Over the next two days we will talk about the issues confronting us and how we have developed our systems, in terms of procedures, technology and other innovations. It is a fact that Government jobs continue to be the most sought after career option for young educated Indians. Our challenge is to select the most suitable candidates for the jobs in an objective and transparent manner, redesigning and improving our systems to make the competitive examinations less stressful for the young candidates. We need to make the application procedures simpler, compress the time cycles for exams, refine the RRs to better codify the selection criterion, induct IT systems to enhance efficiency and transparency and provide a more candidate-friendly environment for all our selection exercises. Between 2007-08 and 2018-19, we at the UPSC, have developed IT tools to reduce the processing time for Direct Recruitment cases from 397 to 194 days and for DPCs from 133 to 44 days.

Some innovative steps were taken to streamline the processes for screening applicants when we undertook the selection for Lateral Entry at the Jt. Secy. Level, mentioned earlier. Shri Rakesh Gupta, former Secretary of the UPSC, will make a presentation on this exercise later today. Our scheme for disclosing the scores and ranking of non-recommended candidates on our website, has met with some success. There are reports that many employers are using this database for selecting candidates for their enterprises.

To fulfill the need for exchange of information on Court cases being handled by PSCs, the UPSC has developed an e-portal on its website containing important Court orders and rulings pertaining to functioning of the PSCs. We can enrich this site further with active participation of all PSCs.

Following a decision taken in the 21st. National Conference, the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI), Hyderabad worked with us to hold a workshop on "Interview Techniques" in November last, which was attended by over 50 Hon. Chairmen and Members of various PSCs. ASCI, as you know, is an institution of excellence and national importance which has pioneered post experience management education in India. On our request, ASCI has consented to make a presentation on their "findings and recommendations" from the aforementioned workshop. Their presentation today will give us a useful opportunity to discuss related issues with the experts. Let me emphasize that an appreciation of the techniques for interviews is not going to immediately improve the quality of assessment, or make it markedly objective. This is an exercise to bring about qualitative improvements in an incremental manner. The value of interviews, especially for higher level positions, should never be undervalued. We have repeatedly come across candidates appearing for interviews where the board members are surprised by the candidate's extremely poor performance even though he/she had cleared one, or sometimes two, stages of written tests. "Cracking" a written test often might not be a sufficient indicator of a candidate's suitability for the job and Personality Tests serve an important role. The challenge is to reduce the subjectivity.

A third presentation on the use of technology in PSCs will be made by Hon. Chairman of the Gujarat Public Service Commission. Though I will not be able to attend this presentation, I would like to put in a word of caution for your consideration. Information Technology, which is a service sector activity meant to support physical economic activity like industry, production, construction and agriculture etc. is increasingly feeding on itself. In the wake of lowered industrial and production activity across the world, IT is creating a need for more IT by creating data and processing the same, where there is no need. IT and Artificial Intelligence are creating avenues for the worst inequitable distribution of wealth ever seen in the world. All IT processes brought into our systems should therefore start with an analysis of the need for IT support. Essentially, induction of technology should be driven by our requirements and not because the tools are available in the market and are being aggressively marketed by the vendors. This is not to say that IT should not be used, the important thing is that technology per-se does not ensure a better system. We have to discerning users of technology if we don't want to get trapped into situations where we keep on becoming dependent on technology we don't really understand, eventually losing control over our systems.

Finally, I would like all of you to remember that between us we share hundreds of years of institutional experience which we can share to fulfill our mandate enshrined in the spirit of the Constitution. On our part the UPSC is committed to lending full support for following up on decisions taken at the National Conferences.

I wish the conference all success.